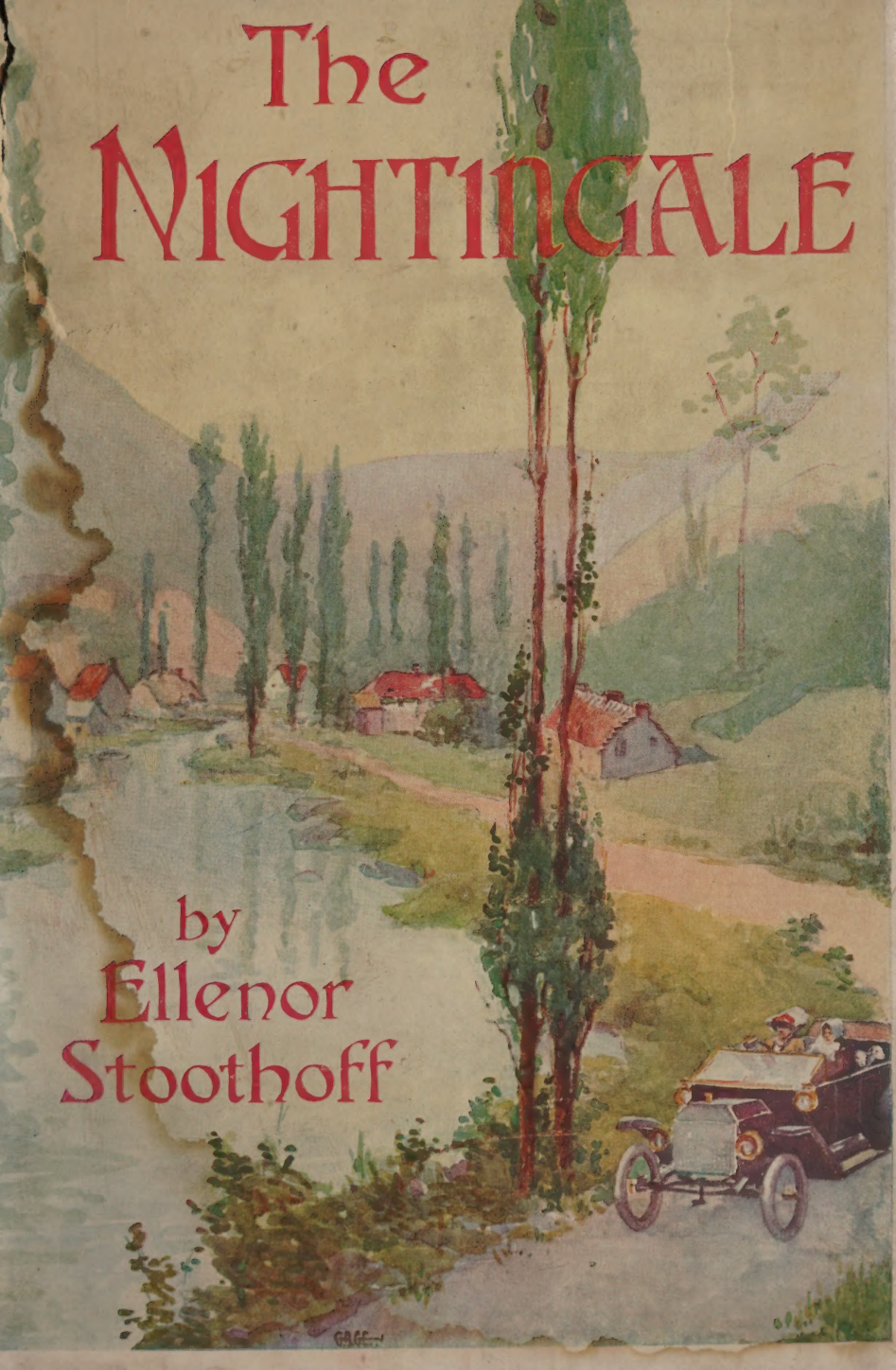


The NIGHTINGALE

by
Ellenor
Stoothoff



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The Nightingale

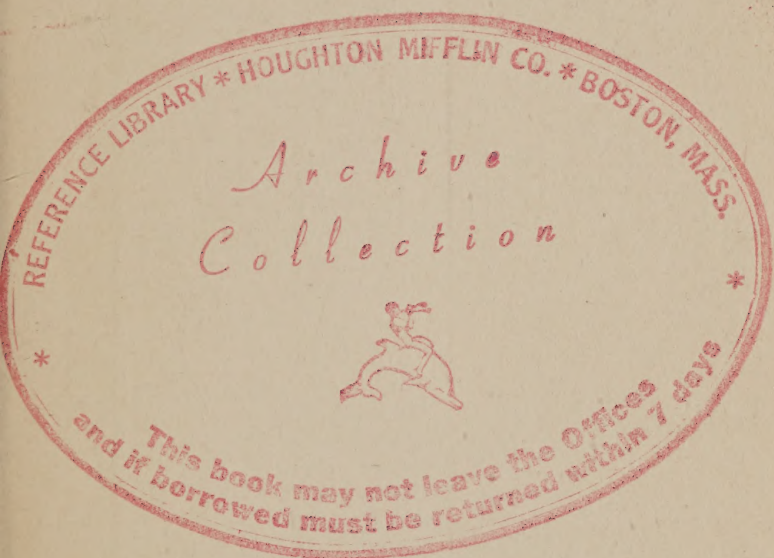
By ELLENOR STOOHOFF

Hilda is an impulsive creature, and in the partial state of ill-health in which she finds herself, she decides that the only thing to do is to run away by herself and to stay away until she is perfectly well. On impulse, therefore, she starts for Europe, leaving husband and children behind. The story follows irresponsible wanderings about Europe in company with Suzetta, a young Italian girl, adopted as maid and friend. The ostensible object of Hilda's search is a nightingale which she wants to hear sing. Her adventures are delightfully humorous and interesting and they end most happily in Hilda's reunion with her husband and family.

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THE NIGHTINGALE

THE NIGHTINGALE

A Lark

BY

ELLENOR STOOHOFF



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THE NIGHTINGALE

CHAPTER I

A VERY little person, at least she looked little in the darkened room, was sitting up in the middle of a very big bed eating her breakfast. About her, all over the surface of the bed, was a tangle of things — a dressing-jacket or two, a package of letters, a child's hair-ribbon, several volumes of German songs, — Wolf, Strauss, and Franz, — a block of writing-paper, a very blunt and much-abused pencil, a diaphanous little wisp of a dressing-gown, a florist's catalogue of bulbs, a couple of long crêpe scarfs making splendid splashes of color, a doll, its hair all tousled up and a broken arm carefully tied tight about its body with a blue string, — these and the tray were all distinguishable at a hasty glance. A really concentrated look would have disclosed various other unallied objects.

Mrs. Maneley herself seemed perfectly oblivious of the general confusion. She was balancing

THE NIGHTINGALE

the tray on her lap, and her legs were curled up under her in some obscure but evidently comfortable fashion. This she had herself evolved as a child. Apparently she never grew up enough to discontinue it; except, of course, on the most formal occasions, when by firmly focusing her mind on her feet she was able to keep them both, side by side, on the floor. On the tray, flanked by coffee and toast, rose a mountainous and very chilly-looking grape-fruit; but though chilly it was not forbidding, and Mrs. Maneley attacked it with enthusiasm. Perhaps its pale yellow gleam made it look seductive—if anything very large can ever be seductive. It was almost as big as its mistress; it differed, of course, in outline.

This particular morning Mrs. Maneley looked a curious mixture of alertness and dejection. She sat rather droopingly in the midst of the swirl of color—she herself, though pale, the most vivid thing in the room. As she slipped back on her pillow, after carefully putting the tray to one side so there would be room for her feet, she felt tired and discouraged—very much as a flower might that knew it was beginning to wilt, and wished in a subconscious way that some one would give it fresh water or fresh air, or

THE NIGHTINGALE

do something that would enable it to hold its head up a little longer. Mrs. Maneley's face showed that stamped look of settled illness, the kind of indefinite illness that is so hard to fight. She lay with her eyes closed for a few minutes, but opened them as she heard her husband's knock on the door. In response to a little whistle which evidently cost her less effort than to speak, he came in.

He closed the door very softly and walked to his wife's side.

"I did n't speak to you when I came in before breakfast—I thought you were asleep. I've just come in for a second now to say good-bye. Don't wake up," he added as he leaned over to kiss her.

The look in his wife's eyes evidently encouraged him to keep on talking. Hilda had the kind of eyes people like to talk to.

"Why do you lie here in the dark?" He was looking around the room rather anxiously, as though trying to think up something to make her more comfortable. "It's a heavenly day; the sunshine will make you feel better." He walked briskly toward the window.

Mrs. Maneley jerked herself up in bed—some people never like to talk lying down—and spoke

THE NIGHTINGALE

with that sort of nervous precision which is often the outward symbol of an invalid's indecision of mind.

"Please don't. I can't bear the light. I *want* to be in the dark; my eyes ache and I have a raging pain in my head. I am frightfully sleepy. I am going to stay in bed all day."

"Well, perhaps that is wisest. I'll try to come home early." Mr. Maneley was clearing a small section of the bed on which to perch while he continued the conversation. He evidently thought being talked to would be good for the aches and pains.

"I'll come home early, and if you feel better we'll motor out into the country. If you wrap up warmly it will do you good. You can drive."

The modern husband knows the wisdom of dangling a little bait when he makes suggestions.

"My dear," he added, peering at her sharply as though he noticed something unusual in her appearance, "what *have* you got on?"

"Well, my dear, I have on first my nightgown, then I have on your green cardigan jacket." Hilda more or less disclosed these layers as she proceeded. "Then on top I have this" — this being a big, heavy, most becoming crêpe scarf, a whirl of blurry coral color that

THE NIGHTINGALE

floated about her in a shifting Loie Fuller sort of fashion.

“You see,” she waved her hands vaguely over the bed,—in intimate conversation Hilda always used her hands in little up-and-down motions; she looked like a nature teacher explaining the flight of a goldfinch to a group of little nature enthusiasts,—“You see, I’ve had a hideous night. I could n’t sleep; I was awake hours. I ran downstairs and got some sherry and biscuit, then I came back and got all these things to try to get warm; then I could n’t sleep, so I got this music and ran through some of these songs. I planned menus for three or four heavenly dinners; I read that stupid book”—she pointed disdainfully to a fat volume just off the press—“advertised everywhere, too. I do not see why—I suppose it can’t get going by itself. I did *everything*; then I decided the reason I could n’t sleep was that my back was cold. So I went to your closet and stole this.” Hilda held out her arms better to display the jacket. “I made a special effort not to wake you,” she continued, looking up at Horace, who was listening patiently, but apparently without surprise, to her account of her *nuit blanche*. Hilda often spent most of the night walking

THE NIGHTINGALE

about the house seeking solace for her wakeful spirit.

"I wanted something close to my back," she proceeded. "None of these float-y things," she gazed scornfully at the collection on the bed, "was any good. Then, when I sat up for my breakfast, I covered it up with this scarf. I thought maybe the jacket by itself looked too tailor-made. Perhaps, though, it is not so bad — how do you like it — by itself?" She pulled off the scarf and sat disclosed in a lovely green-and-blue, deliciously woolly-looking jacket several sizes too big for her.

"I think I am quite Bakst-esque, don't you?" She was evidently anxious for Horace's opinion.

A cogitating and strictly judicial expression came into her husband's eyes. A sort of surface cogitation it was, for in his eyes, whenever they looked at Hilda, was a deep, fundamental expression of affection and admiration; nobody knew how many of these substrata there were, but they were all of a very large area — almost geological.

"It's a great success — surprisingly piquant — something ultra-modern about such good, strong colors in bed; but really, my dear," he continued, "it's a specially cold morning; the

THE NIGHTINGALE

office will be specially cold, and also, in the last analysis, that jacket is specially my property." Horace talked soothingly, as though by the tone of his voice he hoped to dispel Hilda's woes. "Do you realize, if you continue to wear it, that while your vertebræ are warm and contented, mine will freeze? In other words, I need that jacket myself. I have just spent ten minutes in a vain search for it. Don't you think you could find something among your own belongings equally warm? Surely," he said, forgetting apparently his appreciation of its Bakst-esqueness, "you have something more becoming." He started to disengage a Chuddah-like looking thing from the general débris.

"Oh, those are all *too* feminine. I am tired of being pink and blue and lavender in bed, just to help make me look pretty. Still," Hilda paused, "maybe this is n't becoming. I will see for myself." She leaned quickly over to her dressing-table and picked up a hand-mirror. All her motions seemed to be a series of darts. She made one think a little of a gigantic hummingbird.

"No, I don't believe it is," she decided. "I'll let you take it if you will bring me a blanket—a thick, woolly one to curl all up in

THE NIGHTINGALE

—pull one off your bed. Horace, you really are an angel! Thanks.” Her eyes thanked him, too, as he rolled her up in it very skillfully, — for Horace had camped out, and knew all the ins and outs of blankets, — and deposited a kiss on her hair for good luck.

“I don’t see why,” when Hilda ruminated on a subject she was inclined to be oblivious of the flight of time, “with all the advance there has been in civilization, people still contentedly freeze in bed between sheets — linen ones, too. I believe it’s the only thing in the whole world that has n’t advanced during the ages. It’s discouraging. I wish we were n’t so civilized and did n’t have to open our windows at night. I don’t believe there’s a person in the whole world who in childhood, youth, and middle age has n’t shivered himself almost out of existence because he was cold in bed. Any half-way adequate invention would make one a millionaire.”

Mr. Maneley was escaping with the jacket, a rather bedraggled booty, over his arm. He turned back and leaned over Hilda for another kiss.

“Don’t be so pessimistic. Neither pajamas nor hot-water bottles were prevalent at the time of the Renaissance. Things move slowly in this

THE NIGHTINGALE

world. Perhaps before we die something new will appear."

"Well, I ought n't to grumble," responded Hilda. "This blanket is very satisfactory." Her head, sticking out of it, looked very like a little chick poking its head out of a candy Easter egg. "Probably the ancient Greeks, Homer and Euripides and Sophocles, all slept rolled up in blankets. It is not at all a bad way. There is a good deal in the classic spirit after all." She turned over, feeling very tranquil and cozy, and before she knew it, was sound asleep.

She had slept hardly an hour when she was awakened by a very soft knock on the door.

"If you please, Mrs. Maneley, this box has just come with a note. It is Mr. Maneley's writing, so I thought you might want it right away. I hope I did n't wake you up," the maid continued as she rolled up the shade a trifle and deposited the box on the bed.

It was a florist's box, and looked suspiciously like violets or orchids — it surely was n't roses, it was n't the right shape. Hilda sat up in bed and pulled the string off, slam-bang, as her little son would have said. "Oh, joy!" It was something even nicer than violets or orchids, — at least, according to Hilda's way of thinking.

THE NIGHTINGALE

It was a big bunch of fragrant freesia, Hilda's favorite flower.

A hurried little note was scratched on a card.

"These aren't as good as I would like, but I've stopped at two or three places, and these were the best I could find. *Coraggio*. I'll call up Minnie about eleven and hope to hear you are feeling better." The note was signed "H" and a scrawl.

With a bit of the freesia tucked just where she could get comfortable whiffs of it with the least effort, — for Mrs. Maneley from much experience as a semi-invalid had learned how to get results with the minimum of exertion, — she curled up again in one of those queer, childlike positions she seemed to fall into naturally, and a little scowl which always came when she thought hard began to make a timid appearance between her eyebrows. The perplexing thoughts that had bothered her for so many months began to reassert themselves.

Really, how *could* she, when Horace was so good to her, run away just for a whim — at least, that's what other people would think it was. She made the hasty correction so as to be perfectly fair to her own point of view. It really did seem silly to leave a comfortable home, an

THE NIGHTINGALE

adoring and adored husband, two adoring and adored children, just because she was restless and half ill.

But why should restlessness be a synonym in most people's minds for sheer foolishness? In either case it was a thing you had to pull yourself out of, and generally to make a real cure you had to do it in your own way. If she stayed at home,—Hilda's thoughts ran along rather disconnectedly,—she would probably turn into some kind of a criminal. She might rob a bank just because she could n't think of anything else she wanted to do. It was certainly wiser to run away and be a gypsy—to take a sedative *Wanderjahr* and return with her nerves all neatly arranged in ganglia where they ought to be, not flying about asserting themselves where they were not wanted. That was the trouble with her—simply bad-mannered nerves. They interfered and interrupted unpardonably. She did not want to rout them with a rest cure, she had a horror of getting fat; she would simply run away and plunge them into new experiences—the way one plunges things into boiling water to kill the germs.

There are lots and lots of women who would like to run away,—Hilda's thoughts were pad-

THE NIGHTINGALE

dling about in all sorts of little side channels, — but none of them dare. They all want to have a change of scene and come back resuscitated, but it's too hard getting the various factors of a modern holiday arranged. They're afraid of this and afraid of that. They're afraid of gossip if they go alone, or afraid of being alone and having to depend on their own resources, or afraid that their families will miss them, or that they will miss their families.

All these afraids piled up make a tremendous, cumulative, insuperable mass. Therefore, women stay at home rather than try to batter it down.

But Hilda was different. She had a good deal of spirit and a pretty athletic type of mind. With her it was a very simple matter. She simply leap-frogged lightly in her thoughts over all these objections. She was wide awake now, thanks to her mental gymnastics, and her mind had come to the real crux of every debatable question in this age, MONEY. Where would she get it? She floundered around in her mind and thought of all possible schemes. Alas, all the possible ones became impossible as soon as considered.

Never mind, she was going to do it. She was

THE NIGHTINGALE

going to run away and stay till she got well. She refused to be a millstone — a synonym for doctor's bills — a second longer. If she died, everything would go along just the same. It always did. Why should n't it if she just ran away for a lark? What's more, she would n't plan a thing. She would n't say, "I wonder if I could get off next month — maybe by Christmas." — "I wonder if I should need a rain-coat?" She did n't want any suggestions about the Hotel Cosmical here, or the Pension Primitif there. No, Hilda came to a quick decision. She would go the next day, and she would n't tell a soul!

Please do not think I am exaggerating the speed or lack of logical sequence of our heroine's thoughts. They are being put down exactly as they came to her. Women cannot be expected to work things out clearly and calmly as do men. Hilda was only fumbling about with that modern idea of "freedom" which is seething to-day in every feminine breast, — against which the hackneyed conventions of past ages prove so frail a bulwark.

To be sure, at this moment Hilda was working out the idea rather fast!

The exhilaration of it made her headache

THE NIGHTINGALE

disappear. She jumped out of bed with a curious sense of elation. She would go to-morrow! She would pack to-day so as to be ready! Something would surely turn up to make it possible.

"I am sure I can go. I am sure I can go." These words danced over and over again in her head.

A curious new sense of being alive and master of her destiny came to Hilda. She dressed hurriedly, and as she moved to the glass to arrange her hair she gave a happy little laugh of surprise. She had never noticed before that she had such pretty eyes.

She clapped her hands like a child.

"To-morrow I shall surely go," she thought. "Oh, dear, I hope I am not wicked. Oh, dear, I do hope people won't think I am crazy. Oh, I do hope Horace will know it's because I love him."

CHAPTER II

BY four o'clock that afternoon Hilda had her plans well under way; had in fact almost finished her packing. She had put in one or two simple and unobtrusive little gowns. It would be dreadful to be taken for an adventuress; besides, she had some Boston blood in her veins and really wanted to be inconspicuous.

Unbelievable — but true — she had already got her funds for the trip, engaged her passage on the Phlegmatic, which she found was sailing the next day (fortunately in October the steamers are n't crowded), had made a few hurried purchases for the children, to leave them well stocked for the winter; she had even taken Lætitia's broken doll to the doll's hospital just as she had promised her she would that morning, when it had been deposited so trustingly on Hilda's long-suffering bed. Now all she had to do was to write Aunt Letty, whom she was going to ask to come and give a motherly touch to the household, if she would, while she was away; write a second letter, a long, explanatory one, to Horace to read after she had gone; and

THE NIGHTINGALE

last, but not least, keep her secret and keep up her courage.

She hated to leave the children. Children need a great deal of affection and cuddling. Each person gives it in his or her own individual way. She knew they would miss her. Besides, she was not quite sure any one else could be trusted to look after Paul's ears without hurting him. Molly, the nurse, had n't a very good touch when it came to ears. Paul squirmed terribly and sometimes cried. Hilda always performed that ceremony herself. To be sure, she often forgot it, but it was better for Paul to be less immaculate and remain uninjured. Hilda decided she must have a headache that night and so excuse herself from the final in-bed kiss which the children always expected the last thing — and then "one more" after the last tuck and pat, and then "just a last one" after the light was out, and there was the pleasant excitement of maybe bumping noses in the dark. No, Hilda could n't leave home if she did all those things to-night. She would steel her heart and stay downstairs.

A chance glance at the clock interrupted these pensive thoughts.

"Oh, dear, I am late. I shall have to hurry.

THE NIGHTINGALE

It's four now. Heavens! there's the car." As she tucked some freesia in her belt she heard the particular hoot of joyful anticipation that Horace always seemed able to inject into his horn when using it as a signal to his wife. Horns are usually anything but docile and the last instrument in the world one would choose for emotional expression — still, to a lover all things are possible. In such hands even a dollar horn catches something of the plaintive tone of an oboe.

"I will not look at him," thought Hilda. "I can't. I'll make-believe my eyes ache." She pulled her veil tighter over her eyes and wished she had put on a thicker one. "Oh, dear! will he ever forgive me?"

Hilda banged the hall door after her as she ran down the steps, and a second later she banged the door of the car.

"Where would you like to go?" asked her husband, peering at her through his goggles. "You look much better. Do you feel like a long ride — into real country? What do you say to Brookford?"

"Heavenly," answered Hilda.

Horace beamed happily. Brookford was their favorite drive. Hilda had sweetly said, as she

THE NIGHTINGALE

pulled up the rug, that Horace could drive, after all : it was fussy driving in town, and she would rather keep busy just taking long breaths.

The usual formalities which always occurred as soon as they got away from the eyes of the populace were observed. Hilda patted her husband's hand as it rested on the wheel, and he, after steadying his grip with the other, returned it with an ardent pressure. Then they beamed at each other through their goggles. Not the ugliest kind, I am happy to say, — just big, heavy, shell-rimmed ones that broke the wind and gave them a deliciously fantastic appearance, a little like two enterprising and very wide-awake owls.

After assuring themselves by this glance that their affections were still in a perfectly satisfactory state, they proceeded to look about once more at the landscape.

They turned into a sleepy, winding, and leaf-strewn road. It formed a narrow lane between long stretches of half-bare trees whose leaves fell lazily or swirled capriciously all about them. It was almost a fairy adventure to drive slowly through that maze of lovely color, the soft swish of the dead leaves beneath the tires the only sound they heard.

THE NIGHTINGALE

"I'm worried," — Horace suddenly broke the silence, — "really worried about you. You have had so much hard illness. Things have got awfully on your nerves, and I'm firmly convinced, Hilda, that you must break away and have a change. You mustn't keep on at home when you're so tired."

He seemed to take it for granted Hilda would protest on the score of expense so he went on hurriedly.

"It can all be easily managed. Instead of making that thousand-dollar payment on The Hilltop, you must go abroad."

Like every other young married couple, Horace and Hilda had just bought an old farmhouse, on which the alterations — again an experience common to humanity — had footed up to some six times the original estimate. Hence an ugly little mortgage which they were struggling valiantly to pay off.

Horace continued, "We have all the rest of our lives to pay off that note. It will add an interest to life if we do it when we are octogenarians. The important thing is for you to get away and get rosy and buxom. Do you think you could accomplish three or four months' holiday on one thousand dollars? If

THE NIGHTINGALE

you did n't travel about — just stayed in Italy, I'm sure you could."

He looked up at Hilda inquiringly. She seemed strangely silent. Perhaps it was surprise — the very unexpectedness of the idea might have proved a little staggering; still, it was unlike her not to give at least one little gasp of pleasure. Probably she was thinking of the objections — the impossibility of it.

Hilda finally seemed able to speak. "Oh," she breathed, "you would all prosper. I know everything would be all right; but I would hate to go alone. Besides, there would be so much arranging to do. All the cream would be gone just getting ready. If I went I think I should like to start off without any preliminaries." This was by way of a feeler. "Besides, it is wicked for me to spend so much money. We need a new car next spring; the children need a pony; we all need clothes. No," — her voice died away in a wail, — "it's not feasible. I unfortunately own a conscience. But it would be fun to go." This last sentence followed a long, ruminating pause.

"There's no question of conscience about it," responded Horace; "you are going, and we will look up steamers this very night. Some

THE NIGHTINGALE

one will surely turn up to go with you. But if no one does, you won't mind being alone. You love Italy, and it is fortunately full of people who like to be talked to." He smiled around at Hilda. "All you need is a few picturesque old derelicts, and an assortment of children, and a place to sit and swing your legs. I can't imagine you ever being anywhere and being bored."

Horace kept piling up arguments, Hilda seemed so unresponsive. "You know plenty of people in Florence and Rome and will have dozens of letters. Don't you like it? Don't worry about the money—that mortgage will be a pleasant excitement in our old age."

Hilda smiled feebly.

"Say you will go," he urged.

Hilda nodded her head.

"Hurrah! It is all settled." Horace felt as though he had conquered the Medes and the Persians. In fact it was an even greater victory, —he had got a woman to make a decision.

He opened the throttle in his excitement, and they dashed along at the nerve-racking rate of thirty miles an hour. In the make of car they patronized this was about as fast as one could comfortably go. A higher speed

THE NIGHTINGALE

gave premonitory rattlings and swayings which common humanity made one realize was not for the car's highest good.

A rather bad bounce brought Hilda out of a little daydream into which she had fallen; at least, so her husband had interpreted it. In reality she was lashing herself into shape to keep up her deceit. There was no doubt she was a very wicked woman. What would Horace say when he found out later that at this very moment she knew the number of her state-room and had even pasted the labels on her luggage?

"Still, it is really because I love him," she insisted to herself. "It is the only way I can do it. I will come back all made over and be like the ladies in books who are inspirations to good deeds, and consolations after bad ones. Now I am merely negative and destructive. I am sure I am doing right."

This thought was so stimulating that she looked up at Horace with the most open and confiding little smile, such is the guile of woman, and patted his hand again.

"Would you always love me, no matter what I did?" she said impulsively.

Horace gave as loverlike and satisfactory a

THE NIGHTINGALE

response as it is possible to give when driving a car, and Hilda's mood instantly changed. From being depressed and taciturn, she became absurdly gay and vivacious. They planned some of the details of her trip, which Horace thought would better come in January. Then Thanksgiving and Christmas would be out of the way. One reason Hilda was going now was to escape these festivities.

"Thank Heaven!" she thought, "I shall have only one day of these awful twinges. Tomorrow as soon as I start it will be exciting, and that will keep me going. I hope it will be rough. I'll pray for a storm as soon as we are out of the harbor. Then I'll succumb instantly and be beyond the reach of my conscience."

She sank back in her seat — even deep breathing had n't made the drive as easy as she had hoped — and did n't speak again until they reached home.

CHAPTER III

AT a quarter past five the next afternoon, — it was October 12, and Horace always remembered the time, for he had just that moment looked at his watch, — he entered his room and saw on the bureau an envelope. It was a large square envelope, very, very bulky, and addressed in a scrawly, hurried hand. It said "HORACE" — then across the bottom, clearly an afterthought, was written "*Good news — don't worry.*" Horace opened it, expecting to find some unimportant message — that Hilda would n't be in till late, and not to wait tea for her, or that she had stolen five dollars from his wallet to get tickets for Wednesday night, or any other of a hundred characteristic little notes. What he found was this, — a tremendously long, penciled letter, evidently written in great hurry and excitement. Before he had read three lines his legs began to feel tottery and the bureau looked blurry and far away. The bed was, fortunately, near the bureau; so he sat down on its edge at a limp angle. He pulled a pillow toward him unconsciously, as a sort of support.

THE NIGHTINGALE

The pillow somehow was a comfort, and he saw from the letter that Hilda had left whiskey and told him to take some, so he got up and gulped some down. Then he started in again with the letter.

“HORACE DEAR, — Perhaps it was n’t quite fair to say on the envelope ‘Good News — don’t worry’ — that was just so you would n’t be frightened when you saw the note. Perhaps you had better drink the whiskey now. You will see I’ve put it on your bureau back of your hairbrushes. Take some before you read any more. Now if you feel brave I will tell you — I am running away, but it’s not a vulgar ranning away. I’m not running off with a man, or with anybody’s money, or even with the idea of never coming back. I am just going off for a lark, and I’m going to stay away till I feel amiable and alive. I just could n’t wait till January till we had the money. Horace, dear, I felt so *wicked* yesterday when you were planning for me to go — for I had my ticket all bought, and my baggage labels pasted on, and everything was ready. But I really have n’t been deceiving you very long. I only made up my mind yesterday morning — in bed, just before

THE NIGHTINGALE

your freesia came. That made me hesitate for a second, but the idea had acquired too much momentum. I simply *had* to go.

“First, I must tell you it’s all paid for. The minute I decided to go I felt as strong as a derrick. I jumped right out of bed, there were so many things to do, for I decided to start to-day. Then, of course, I had no idea where the money would come from ; I simply decided to make my preparations and have faith, as it says in the Bible. There were a million errands. I had to get things for the children and myself, and I decided to stop and order the groceries as I went by instead of telephoning.

“Mr. Porter himself happened to be at the cashier’s desk. You know what a very kind face he has, and I stopped to speak to him — it was the first time I’d seen him this fall — and he was so sympathetic about all our illness that the idea suddenly popped into my head, ‘I do believe if I asked Mr. Porter he would lend me the money.’ But it was awkward to ask him. I might have, but Fate intervened. Of course, I needed privacy and time to make a demand like that, and a fussy little old lady came in and pattered about, and then the boy was stupid, and kept saying, ‘White or brown, Mrs.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Maneley?' — I had gone in to buy sugar, — and I had to stop thinking how best to ask Mr. Porter and say, 'Neither, — lump.'

"However, I'm glad now there were interruptions, for it gave me time for the salutary second thought. I remembered that I was n't a unit — that unfortunately my actions involved you — that now we are very respectable, but we might not be if I tried to borrow money in places that were unusual, though why, when it's a business matter, one should n't borrow from any one who has it and is willing, I don't see. The more I thought, the wiser it seemed not to do it — though Mr. Porter still looked very pleasant — I am quite sure he would n't have minded a bit. He could n't possibly have looked so cheerful and happy if he hadn't been aware of a large balance at his bank.

"Anyway, I had a swift and overpowering return of common sense. I hope, dear, this is not too scrawly. I have to write so awfully fast. I'm glad now I was so sensible, and on the way home I thought of Aunt Letty. Don't you remember last summer when she was visiting us she said, 'My dear, you do need a good rest. Try next winter to go abroad with friends. I'll see you have the money.' I suddenly had an inspi-

THE NIGHTINGALE

ration — how stupid of me to wait around for people — why not make an opportunity up in my own head and just sail off by myself? So I telegraphed her that very second I went into a pay telephone booth, ‘Splendid and most unexpected chance to go to Europe. Sail immediately. If you really meant offer, can you telegraph me at once one thousand dollars? Letter follows.’

“Horace, it seems like a fairy story, but, my dear, it is true. By two in the afternoon I had the money by telegraph and simply had to race down to the steamship office to settle things up. My two suitcases were packed, I borrowed your big new one, and the children’s new things were all ordered, ready for winter. All I had to do was to write this letter and rest a second, so as to be calm at four when you came in the car.

“My ticket is Naples, but I may get off at Monte Carlo — not, of course, to stay at that awful place — just to go to one of those lovely little villages near by, or I may go to Egypt, I can’t tell. I want to be perfectly *free* to do as I please, and I don’t want to be bothered by any advice or any feeling as to what I ought to do. So I am not going to write you, or let you write me. I mean we will both write, but we

THE NIGHTINGALE

won't *read* them. I'll explain later. I want to be quite untrammelled in my movements and run around Europe like a colt in a big breezy pasture, just tossing up my head and kicking up my heels and feeling *alive*.

"If there's any real reason for coming home, cable Morgan Harjes — I'll keep in touch with them — and, of course, I'll come at once; — and if you disapprove awfully, send me a marconigram and I'll come back from Genoa. But I have a feeling that you won't be unkind and balk at this lovely scheme. You have always said the way to rule women was by 'noble bends of concession.' Here, my dear, is a chance for a particularly good bend. And this way is so care-free and spontaneous and offhand! I will just make believe I'm a gypsy, and have a sort of bareheaded holiday away from people. Of course, I will be very discreet and not look at a soul. Nobody, of course, would look at me; but if you would feel more comfortable, I will always wear goggles. If I see an interesting-looking man, I will always pull them right out of my pocket and put them on.

"About letters. You know how I love Padua, the lovely Giotto's, the trip down from Venice, — well, we will write letters, of course, only we

THE NIGHTINGALE

won't send them to each other — we'll send them to Padua, Poste Restante. Then either of us can go there at any time and get them, if we find we want news. I'm doing this primarily because I do so want to disappear, to get away from my old routine, and work out a new and detached environment. Out of it I'm going to construct a new, wholesome, and hard-as-nails Hilda. Please let me do it my own way. I will send a letter every week to Padua — to you, of course — and once a month I'll cable you, 'Well and happy,' so that you'll know I'm all right. I'll give it to anyone I happen to meet, to send from anywhere they happen to be, *purposely*, so you won't know where I am. It may start from the Nile, or Montenegro, or Sweden. But I will promise not to go near the Balkans; I think myself they are dangerous just now. I think this way it will all be so mysterious and elusive, and that's the trouble with married people. They never dare go off and do unexpected things. They think they have to stay side by side and be conventional. It's terribly deadening. They lose all their sense of resiliency. No wonder people get discouraged and divorced — it's the only way they get any excitement. If women had more mild, jolly little adventures

THE NIGHTINGALE

with their own husbands they would have fewer wild ones with other people's. Of course this is not exactly an adventure with you, dear, because you are being left behind, but still it is the same idea.

"I am writing Aunt Letty to ask her if she would like to come and stay with you for the winter. I feel sure she will, so I am leaving a long letter for her on the guest-room mantel.

"Now, dear, I have arranged *everything*. All you will have to do is to explain to people. Just say anything that sounds plausible. You may have to think it up quite fast, for I asked the Ralph Taylors and their cousin in to dinner to-night. Don't, even if you're upset, telephone them not to come; they would suspect something. I would hate to be gossiped about. Have the cousin sing after dinner. That will distract your mind.

"Just tell them, — this is in case you can't think up anything quickly yourself: of course you'll be a little upset, — that a cable came from a very dear cousin of mother's — very old and frail — alone, too — in Munich, who is very ill. She had been awfully good to us as children; there was no one else to go, so I just had to dash off to stay indefinitely. Nobody could possibly

THE NIGHTINGALE

think there was anything queer about my going if you explain it that way. I would hate to be talked about.

“Oh, I’ve forgotten the most important thing. You know I’ve always wanted to hear a nightingale sing, and never succeeded. So I’ve determined this time to stay over till I do. I’ll promise you solemnly to turn around and come back the minute I hear one. But I won’t promise to sit in Hadrian’s Villa and get malaria just waiting for it. I’ll leave it to Fate.

“Now I think that is everything. Take some more whiskey before dinner, and always be sure that I love you above everything else in the world. And I promise to come back as soon as I hear the nightingale and be so well and so happy and so tractable you will love me to *distraction* !

“HILDA.

“P.S. I must tell you about your coat, — your winter overcoat. I’m afraid I didn’t pack it away very well ; anyway, it had some moth-holes in it — one right under the chin. So I gave it to Mr. Jenkins, — you know, that man who used to go around in the summer killing gypsy moths. We both thought he had such an interesting face. I heard he had had hard luck, so I hunted

THE NIGHTINGALE

him up. He looks very well in it. It fits him and makes him look extraordinarily capable. I told him I felt sure he could do newspaper work — to go right away and see if he could get a position, but, above all, to keep on the coat while he arranged about the work and salary. It would give him confidence and make him look energetic and trustworthy. He went away greatly encouraged. I hope you approve —

“But be sure to order a new one right away — so as to have it in plenty of time for cold weather. Be sure to do this or I shall be worried.

“P.P.S. I forgot the clothes-posts. Get John, the new furnace-man, to shovel the paths about the posts *always* early Monday morning for the maids, if there's snow. Minnie is extremely particular about the little amenities of life. She might be cross and leave. She also likes to get off very early her afternoons out. I often have Bridget serve the lunch so she can start by two. But I'll explain all this to Aunt Letty. Don't worry about anything. *Coraggio*, as you say. My conscience is surprisingly clear, so I know I am doing the right thing. We must both just think of it as one grand, glorious lark. Good-bye.

H.

THE NIGHTINGALE

"I forgot to tell you my steamer, the Phlegmatic. Of course, it is awfully slow, but it is very steady."

In Chicago two days later Aunt Letty received a letter, too.

"DEAREST AUNT LETTY—I am leaving a long letter for you at home on the guest-room mantel, where you will sleep, so this will just be a line to tell you how frightfully bad I have been. I have deceived you terribly. I am going to Europe alone—I just made it up in my head—I am not going with a soul. Do you think, as a great favor,—I mean, would you care to come over to stay with Horace and the babies for the winter? There are lots of things here to interest you. I think you would like it. If you feel you could, I should be so glad, for then I could run away without a single twinge to my conscience. (But it is not a wicked running away. I am coming back. It is just to get well.) Dear Aunt Letty, I cannot tell you how good it is of you to do all this for us—the money and everything. That is the trouble when one is such an angel—people do impose on you. If you disapprove, be sure and realize it is all

THE NIGHTINGALE

me — Horace is perfectly innocent. He did n't know a think about it. I hope you all have a lovely winter. I have a feeling you will come and it is so *sweet* of you. Ever,

“HILDA.

“P.S. Would you mind helping Paul just a little with the waltz? He knows the step, but gets mixed up when he turns. It is so nice having him in the same class with Lætitia. I would hate to have him drop out. Maybe he would better have a couple of private lessons, but it is so simple, if you could just coach him a little I'm sure he would be all right. I think you would enjoy it. Do take my place in my dancing-class, won't you? It meets Thursday morning. The thing that makes me hate most to leave is the children's dancing and music. They do need a little help. Lætitia needs an overseeing eye as she practices. She is inclined to keep at least two pedals down all the time. And they will miss their little singing games. Would you sometimes, as a great treat, play 'Old Roger' with them? You just lie down on the floor and pretend to be dead. They do all the acting and singing. And if you could learn to drum out the 'Roman Soldiers' it

THE NIGHTINGALE

would be lovely. Much, much love and a million thanks.

“HILDA.”

That same night on the Phlegmatic, Hilda lay fast asleep in her berth. The ship creaked and pitched, but she was tired from excitement, and slept as peacefully as if she were in her own room at home, with two windows wide open and Lætitia's and Paul's good-night kisses still sweet and rapturous on her lips.

It was after ten. A stewardess came and looked in cautiously, after unhooking the door. In her hand were two messages. She seemed uncertain whether or not to waken Hilda. She exuded from her person that peculiar mixture of professionalism and motherliness which every good stewardess aspires to. The motherliness is, of course, variable. It comes and goes. It is more apparent when her appraising eye sees signs of a generous tip — also when she does n't feel seasick herself. In this instance motherliness triumphed. She switched on the light, and Hilda gradually woke up. She was rather frightened when she saw the envelopes. She took them from the stewardess. They both looked alike. She opened the top one. In her

THE NIGHTINGALE

bed-jacket as she sat up the stewardess noticed a bit of freesia. She decided Hilda was romantic. She asked if there were anything more she could do. Hilda said no, she would snap off the lights herself. If there were answers they could go in the morning. She opened the first message rather tremblingly. It was from Aunt Letty : —

“Leave to-morrow to join children. Am sending \$3000 more to you, American Express, Naples. Safer to have plenty. Avoid Balkans. Dangerous. Love.”

“How sweet of her to think of the Balkans,” sighed Hilda, tucking the message under her pillow. “How darling of her to send such *piles* of money.” Then she tore open the other envelope. This was from Horace. All it said was : —

“Understand perfectly. Love and my blessing.”

Queer little baby tears came into Hilda's eyes. She leaned over and kissed every word. She folded the paper up till it looked like a very thin and anæmic cheese straw. Then she tucked it in her jacket alongside the freesia.

THE NIGHTINGALE

She stood up and looked out of the port-hole.

Blackness and flying foam!

She crawled back into bed and curled up in her blankets.

“Everybody is so good. I must be very good myself,” she thought sleepily. And inside of five minutes she was dreaming.

CHAPTER IV

HILDA'S letters to Horace were sent with remarkable regularity, — "remarkable," for Hilda was a most undependable person in many ways, and unless a promise came within the range of what she termed "solemn," she was a little inclined to live up to its spirit rather than its letter. But this promise to Horace she kept. All through November letters were dropping in upon the postmaster at Padua addressed to Horace Maneley, Esq. They were tucked aside in a cubby-hole with the other unfortunate Postes Restantes which have to hang about indefinitely, like poor stray animals in a rescue league, waiting for the right person to come along and snatch them out of their tedium. Poor Horace! He was not to see his letters for many, many months! Perhaps it was just as well. If he had known all the enterprises on which Hilda was to embark, he would hardly, I think, have waited so patiently at home for Hilda to find her nightingale.

The postman at Padua began to wonder who Horace Maneley might be and when he would

THE NIGHTINGALE

arrive to claim his mail. Dozens of letters were there waiting for him, all addressed in a scrawly feminine hand, all posted in Italy. Letters were also there, a neat pile, addressed to Mrs. Horace Maneley. They were written in a chirography unmistakably efficient and masculine and came from America. It was a mystery!

One special letter, sent, he was sure, by the same lady who had written the others, was mailed at Sorrento. It was extremely fat. The postmaster heaved a sigh. He hoped some day to meet these strange beings face to face. Perhaps they would tell him what it was all about. He felt there was a romance. Ah, if the fat letter could only have been condensed on a postcard!

“DEAREST HORACE,” it began. “The most exciting news! I am going to motor up through Italy, not with friends, just by myself, with a darling little Italian named Suzetta. Did you ever hear anything as ravishing as her name? And I have bought a car. That seemed cheaper than to rent it and maybe have to pay the owner damages, for I may have collisions, etc. It is an English Phord, and I got it for \$400. The tires are very good, one of them has gone three thou-

THE NIGHTINGALE

sand miles, a back one. The other rear one is new — only a couple of hundred miles. The two front ones are both about a thousand miles. They are all Michelins.

“Of course I don’t know anything about the machinery. Everything looks greasy and efficient, the way it ought to, when you take up the hood. The speedometer at times gets a little sulky and refuses to register, and sometimes it gets loose and drags on the ground, and there’s quite a little play in the steering-wheel, which is a nuisance — still, I think I can manage it. It has had quite hard usage — from throwing suitcases around in the back seat. The people I bought it from had toured all the way down from England and were somewhat bohemian. I mean they didn’t stow things away as neatly as you do, so some of the hair is sticking out of the cushions; still, it really looks like a gentleman’s car. I mean it has atmosphere. It has that nice, shabby, enjoyed look which is always so adorable. I wish you were here to tell me whether I got a bargain.

“But I must be chronological. I left Ravello last Friday, nearly a week ago. It was a frightfully cold day, very windy, and the sea

THE NIGHTINGALE

was lovely, full of snappy little waves. We all felt and looked particularly well, — the horse, the driver, and I. The horse was adorned with a particularly long and wobbly feather, and had evidently had grape-nuts for his breakfast, he seemed so frisky and well-nourished, — really looked spirited. The driver looked exactly like a pirate and was very temperamental and volatile. I was so sorry the children couldn't see him, and he was very affable and talkative. I felt like singing — he almost lost control of his horse turning round to compliment me when I was absent-mindedly humming, 'Drink to me only with thine eyes' — so then, seeing that he was musical, we both sang, and he taught me two lovely little Italian songs.

"Now I must explain Suzetta. We are here — at Sorrento — tuning up the car preparatory to running up to Naples to-morrow. I am planning to eat my lunch with Suzetta in the amphitheater at Pompeii. She is a treasure. The way I came to adopt her is this (not a legal adoption — don't be frightened — that is only a term; she is just going to 'companion' me about). She is very strong and can crank the engine for me, and of course her Italian

THE NIGHTINGALE

will be invaluable at garages. I must explain how I got her. I had ordered some little silk blouses and they never, never came. Each day they were promised, each day the sun set without them. Finally I wrote a note and said, 'I am leaving at 6.30 A.M. to-morrow. If my blouses are not here by eight this evening, I WILL NOT TAKE THEM. They will be RETURNED!!!' Hours passed. I sat up till 10.15. Then I went to bed. At 10.35 (I had just hopped into bed) a terrible commotion of boxes and Italian in the hall, loud knocks on my door, and there were two little Italian girls, very smiling and apologetic, and so gesticulating and wide awake at that hour of the night, and so lost in admiration as they gazed at the beauty of the blouses, as they took them out one by one, at my own good taste in selecting the very prettiest models in the whole shop, at their own good fortune in being the fortunate beings to deliver them, etc., etc. Well, I was pirouetting around in front of the glass to see if the prettiest one fitted, when I suddenly saw in the glass that one of those poor children was yawning and rubbing her eyes. I was so ashamed to have kept them waiting when it was so late. They were both so talkative and so vivacious they

THE NIGHTINGALE

had n't seemed tired a bit. So I wrote the check very fast.

“Then, Horace, I had an inspiration. They were sisters, so I thought one could be spared from home. The younger looked specially strong and athletic. I had wished all day I could buy the car from the Holbrooks,—I'll explain them later,—but could n't drive it alone with nobody to talk to, or help in emergencies, or crank it. So I said to the strong sister, ‘My dear, how would you like to drive about Europe with me in a motor-car instead of staying here in Sorrento and working all day in a shop? I think you work too hard. What time do you get up? And do you ever go to bed?’ Oh, yes, yes. She always was in bed by midnight—seldom later, unless the American ladies were in a very great hurry. Then she sometimes stayed at the shop all night. And she was always there by six in the morning. Yes, she was very well paid. She got three francs a week, and on Christmas a new dress, and on her birthday two new complete sets of everything else. My dear, just think!

“Both sisters beamed with pleasure at the happy prospect of travel, the older one most unselfishly, for I said distinctly I could only

THE NIGHTINGALE

take one. So I told them to run home, and the little one, Suzetta, must ask her parents, and I would call in the morning to explain the details. They skipped away with their empty boxes, in great excitement, and I slipped into bed rather excited, too, and tired, for I had to write first to the Holbrooks to say I'd take the car. I felt sure Suzetta could come with me, for, of course, it was a great opportunity to see the world and get a minimum wage. I give her a really livable one, for I know she will get married some day, and she ought to have something saved.

"Now I'll explain the car. I'd been waiting here for those blouses and for the sea to go down so I could get to Capri, where I planned to stay till almost Christmas. Well, the very day I adopted Suzetta—that very morning I had heard from Ravello from the Holbrooks that poor Mr. Holbrook has come down with typhoid in Ravello—such an awful place—up on that hill. He is too ill to be taken to Naples, and the doctor has to come from Salerno. Well, Mrs. Holbrook wrote to ask me, if I heard of any one in Rome who would care to rent their car for the balance of the winter, to let them know. I thought she

THE NIGHTINGALE

asked an awful price, three hundred dollars; still, I rather thought of taking it myself, but could n't, for I was all alone. Then, you see, God sent Suzetta. She is eighteen, very strong, very pretty, very jolly, and speaks good Italian (her mother was a Tuscan), and she can sew. You see, she is a wonderful find. So, the next day, after a *séance* with her parents, I raced right back to Ravello, leaving Suzetta for a day or two with her family for them to get used to the idea. They do things so slowly here. It took several hours' deliberation for them to decide to let her go at all, and I pay her so much more, and it is so much healthier for her, and very educational geographically and linguistically. She knows several English words already.

"I finally persuaded the Holbrooks to sell the car. Do you think I gave too much—four hundred dollars? But they told me all its idiosyncrasies, and that is worth a good deal. One is that it does not respond very well to the emergency brake. You have to jam it on very hard, even on the most trivial occasions—much harder than I'm able to—and besides, though the top is all right when it's down and neatly folded away, when it is up it sags on one side,

THE NIGHTINGALE

just over the front seat, which gives it a lopsided effect, something like a person with a drooping eyelid. It makes it look rather rakish, which I dislike, — we are so very unobtrusive ourselves, Suzetta and I, — still, life is not all steep hills and rainy days, so these too little ‘outs’ don’t bother me much. The car really has character. It does n’t look a bit like those smug, self-satisfied new ones just out of the factory, that show so plainly they know nothing whatever about life. This has an experienced air. It looks exactly like a duenna.

“We have christened the car ‘Bucephalus.’ I christened it in a lonely place on the road at sunset. I did n’t want any one to see us. These peasants are so ignorant and suspicious — not understanding what we were doing, they might have called the *carabinieri* and had us arrested. Suzetta’s mother and father were with us. The mother had never been in a car before. She was quite nervous. It was a joyous occasion, only they seemed to think it was a pity to waste the wine. It might have been more joyous to drink it. Anyway, we all stood solemnly about, and Suzetta’s father broke a bottle of *vino Episcopo*, which I had brought from Ravello and had meant to take home to

THE NIGHTINGALE

you, over the radiator with a few well-chosen remarks. He looked exactly like a bishop. Suzetta calls it Bucephalo.

“I cannot think of anything more about the car. Oh, the carburetor! I could not bother Mr. Holbrook asking him questions (he has been delirious), but in between when he was rational he told Mrs. Holbrook to assure me that it was all right. That was a great comfort, for I know the carburetor is the most important thing, the very life-blood of the engine.

“Much love, dear. It is great fun doing exactly as I please. I shall sometimes ask Suzetta’s advice, but of course I need n’t follow it.

“Ever

“HILDA.”

CHAPTER V

POOOR Italy has been terribly overworked. No one seems able to leave her alone. No pen, however humble, but feels itself competent to gallop along through pages and pages of comment, enthusiastic or derogatory. All real lovers of Italy deplore this state of affairs. They wish only to let her rest in peace; to be awakened at rare intervals, when some fairy prince comes along who possesses "the magical word too few."

So we will repress our enthusiasm and pass lightly over Hilda's adventures as she traveled north from Naples. It was just a bare narrative, anyway,—no real happenings. She spent three weeks or so in Rome, or rather out of it, saw some friends and browsed about in the Campagna and hill-towns in Bucephalus. She made Suzetta happy for life by arranging to have her see the Pope. Suzetta, her eyes shining like stars, made a pretty picture as she tripped down the steps from their hotel and danced across the pavement into her cab, dozens of rosaries jingling from each arm—

THE NIGHTINGALE

all to be blessed and sent to her dear family in Sorrento. She was going to ask her mother to keep Christino's and Domenico's for them till they grew up and were big enough to appreciate them.

They spent a happy four weeks with a charming and most entertaining Italian family a little way out from Sienna, where Hilda chatted both day and night, and even dreamed, in Italian; and where, as she wrote Horace, it "was wonderful. Such good things to eat, such lovely scenery, such sweet people, who could sing and play games, and who let you talk all the time in Italian, all for six francs a day!" To be sure, they were continually freezing to death, seemingly irreparably. But they always in some miraculous way thawed out again, and then, with undiminished enthusiasm, proceeded once more slowly to congeal. That is one of the delights of Italy, and it seemed to agree with Hilda, for she gained two pounds a week all the time she was there.

At Pisa Suzetta loved the picture of St. Agnes in the cathedral. She grew so fond of it that Hilda stayed on an extra day to please her. She would sit for hours watching the great hanging lamp sway gently to and fro in

THE NIGHTINGALE

the gloom, and then look up to see St. Agnes gazing down at her with eyes so sweet and innocent that Suzetta was forced to duck her head for the twentieth time that day, and sink on her knees praying once more that the dear saints would make her good and kind. As though anything in the world, or out of it, could make Suzetta sweeter or kinder than she was already!

They pushed on through Genoa and the little towns of the Italian Riviera. Hilda was worrying a little about the mere red tape of getting into France with the car. She had looked the matter up very carefully in Rome and knew her papers were all right, but there is always one indeterminate factor at every frontier, and that is the officials. Fortunately Hilda had a little knowledge of human nature tucked away for use in just such emergencies. She knew that any man will be nice to any woman if she shows immediately and unmistakably that she considers him a superior being. This Hilda had tact enough to do. She also knew that any official loves to see other people work—even a woman. If they work fast, so much the better. So she and Suzetta always did all they could to placate

THE NIGHTINGALE

these haughty gentlemen by having everything ready and ostensibly visible, and they did whatever they were told to do with the speed and precision of lightning. And they always, invariably, with not a single exception, were smiling and good-natured. As a consequence, their path was strewn with roses; and they rolled across the dreaded frontier with the polished ease of two ambassadors. Soon after they were safely over it the road wound out around a point of land, and they looked back for their last glimpse of Italy.

Hilda stopped the car, and they turned in their seats to wave good-bye. To Suzetta, it meant good-bye to home and to childhood. To Hilda it was a farewell, she had no idea for how long, to the land that had been to her a solace, for both body and soul. She knew she was a different being from the forlorn Hilda who used to look out of the porthole every night and creep back to bed feeling inconceivably little and unimportant and ineffectual, measured against the infinity of sky and sea. Italy had given her back her sense of being a person and a force, and of course that meant that Hilda was getting well.

The run to San Remo from Sienna had been

THE NIGHTINGALE

delightful. From San Remo on, it was not so pleasant — too many cars and too many people. The car, though, behaved splendidly. So did Suzetta. At times she was tactfully talkative, at others tactfully silent. Hilda found her a charming companion. Her good humor, her resourcefulness — at the moments when Hilda's failed, which was seldom — her free and unimpeded Italian at crucial moments — all those difficult little conglomerate pronouns, thrown in so casually, which show to the imposing official that your Italian is bred from the soil and not the result of a few well-planned lessons — in many, many ways she proved invaluable. And to crown it all they had long ago established a fine, workable sense of *camaraderie*.

Hilda spent most of her spare moments congratulating herself on her cleverness in attaching Suzetta to the expedition. She had written to Horace regularly, and thought with satisfaction of the huge pile of letters accumulating in Padua. She almost began to wish Horace would come over to get them. Still, if he joined her they would n't need Suzetta. She would hate to give her up — she really loved the child — and she would lose her freedom. "No," she would say firmly to herself, when her thoughts turned

THE NIGHTINGALE

toward Horace, "no, not yet. This is doing me good. I will keep to the highroads for a while. I'm not ready yet to rush into the woods and hunt for the nightingale." So she fought shy of thickets and shrubbery and trees — every place, in fact, where it seemed to her nightingales might congregate.

Not a word, of course, had she had from home. That was only to come in case she were needed, and strange as it may seem, worry or concern about home matters never troubled Hilda for a second. She had literally wanted to play "being dead." She knew families always went on living healthily and, as far as the children went, happily even after real separations. Why not assume that the usual was the course of events in her own household? She had left every normal family comfort — except her own presence, if that could be called a comfort — every family interest quite undisturbed, had known it would all go on smoothly and pleasantly during her absence. So she very wisely dropped it out of her cogitations and thought only of her own little day-by-day adventures. She had sent four cables — one each month, as she had promised. One she gave to some people on the steamer who were going over to Greece,

THE NIGHTINGALE

asking them to send it from some place, Olympia if they could, on a certain date. The second she sent herself from Frascati. She suddenly remembered it was the right day as she sat at dinner, and got right up and sent it — putting down her glass of wine carefully so as not to spot the *pension* tablecloth.

The third was entrusted to a friendly Scandinavian who was going on to Majorca, and the last she gave casually to a German lady whom she met at Bordighera, an atmospheric young lady who sang *Lieder* in a loud and very resonant voice. This kind lady was going on to the Black Forest and amiably promised to send it from some place in the Fatherland. “Anywhere,” Hilda said, “if it’s only Germany. I do think it would be nice to have one from Germany.” The next one she was hoping to send from Russia. She began to be afraid if Horace saw she was working toward England he would run over, — it was such a little country, and such a short trip on the fast boats, — and try to find her. Yes, it would be safer to make him think she had tacked back to Russia. Arranging it would be no trouble, for on the Riviera, of course, it is the easiest thing in the world to find a Russian. What would the

THE NIGHTINGALE

Riviera be without their furs? Its palms, its blue sky, its yachts, its supposed mildness, its perfumes, none of these is so absolutely necessary to its existence as its sables, — and perhaps too, to the existence of the wearers, for the Cote d'Azur is cold — its blueness is often the result of its frigidity.

Bucephalus proved very dependable and bowled along over the Corniche in quite a professional way. Suzetta was in the greatest spirits; the lovely views, as they climbed higher and higher, made her think of the Amalfi road — only this one was so much higher up — the sea was too far away. Suzetta grew quite cosmopolitan after Rome, and looked almost bored as they drove through Nice.

She was interested, though, in the shops, especially if they had *filet* lace, which she knew how to make, or silk. Then she always liked to go in and learn how much it was a yard and examine the quality with the eye of a connoisseur. The car she watched over like a baby, and saved Hilda much bother by taking the responsibility for the mileage and oiling — keeping the correct balance between the two. Hilda had a little schedule in her head, but driving the car made her forget it, and Suzetta really

THE NIGHTINGALE

saved the life of the engine many times by a timely warning. Of course, after American prices, it seemed pretty expensive,—just running the car, the oil and petrol,—but on the whole Hilda was gladder and gladder that she had made the investment and was n't traveling cooped up in a railway carriage, the tunnels varied only, on the Pisa-Genoa part of the trip, by the lovely glimpses of the sea which, unfortunately, are often blurred by cinders in the eye of the passenger.

In the car she was much more her own mistress. You cannot buy a ticket and then keep changing your mind, and mental flexibility was something more than a mere habit with Hilda. It was, as the reader will discover, the very breath of life.

They had stopped overnight at various places, usually choosing some quiet little inn that looked attractive; and one afternoon, after lunching at Cannes, they drove on slowly westward, wondering whether it would be too long a run to San Raphael, and whether that would n't be a good place to establish themselves for a few weeks. "Let's do it, Suzetta; I'm tired of just going on and on without stopping, just as though we had to get somewhere. Let's settle down in one

THE NIGHTINGALE

place and explore the country — ramify out — get up in the hills. Much as I love the Mediterranean, I want to get away from it. We've had so many 'glimpses' of it that I want to see a brook or a river or a lake or some other geographical form of water. Let's go inland."

Suzetta answered, "Si, si," enthusiastically. She thought it would be lovely to get back into mountains. But did the signora think Bucephalus could climb? "To be sure it can"; Hilda had the greatest confidence in her car. "It may puff and pant and make a fuss, but what do we care? We can put cotton in our ears if the noise bothers us, and we can see more of the scenery if it has to go slowly. That's no reason for not trying." So inland exploration was decided upon, and they kept their eyes open to discover a good base of operations. Hilda almost wished they had stopped at Cannes, but she did hate people so; a quiet place would be better. They stopped their car where there was a particularly pretty stretch of pines and made their tea. Beneath them, toward the west, a lovely little semicircular bay curved in under the hills. They longed to know its name, but the guide-book was packed away in a suitcase where it was too much trouble to get it out. Peacefully

THE NIGHTINGALE

at rest for the night, with sails tight furled, lay a little fleet of fishing-boats. Hilda counted eleven. Along the edge of the water ran a row of little green-encompassed villas, and beyond, where the shore spread out again into the sea, a little inn sat poised at the water's edge.

"I think this place looks inviting. Why not stop here, Suzetta? Oh, I forgot—I said I wanted a river. I've *got* to have a river. We'll have to go on."

"Maybe there is a river here," suggested Suzetta, "back in the country. If we looked we might find one."

"No, rivers never hide away. They always run into the sea, it's instinctive with them. They have to. They never run uphill and they always run to the sea. No, if there's a river, we would see it. It would come down into that bay. It's too bad, just where there ought to be one."

Hilda felt quite cross and badly used as she packed up the tea-things and pulled on her gloves. She glared across the bay at the inn. "I will never forgive you for not being on a river." She hurled this anathema as though she expected the inn to salaam and say it was sorry, but it had done the best it could—it had sim-

THE NIGHTINGALE

ply allowed itself to be erected where chance had laid its foundations. But, perhaps fortunately, inns in real life do not answer back.

The road dipped down almost to the sandy beach, then turned inland into a little valley. At the same moment they both saw a bridge. "Suzetta, it's some kind of a stream, I do believe," whispered Hilda.

"Un rivo," echoed Suzetta in an awed voice; "God is good."

"What a *sweet* place, oh, what a perfect *duck* of a place! Don't you love it, Suzetta?"

Hilda was darting quick little glances away from the road in front, and threw out her clutch and coasted so as to see better. In her excitement, as she looked up the river, she almost bumped into the side railing of the bridge. Never, never was there anything so peaceful as that little valley in the soft evening light. The most placid and composed little stream came vaguely down from the mountains. The greenest and stretchiest meadows bordered it; the airiest, most fairy-like atmosphere filled it with shifting light. Upstream a huge flock of sheep browsed and bleated. Hilda and Suzetta turned their heads; they hated so to leave it, but they had to; for, crossing the bridge, the

THE NIGHTINGALE

road turned back to the shore. Up the bed of the stream from the main highway led the most alluring of little paths. It seemed to lead right into paradise.

“Oh, I will never be happy till I follow that path. We will stop at that inn. We will get up early to-morrow, Suzetta, and see where it goes.”

“What time would the signora wished to be called?” asked the practical Suzetta.

“Oh, I don’t know.” Hilda’s enthusiasm cooled a little as she thought of the crisp morning air. “I think maybe the light would be best about ten. I will have my coffee at nine as usual. We will stay here for ages and ages and go every day to walk in the valley.”

“Would n’t the signora perhaps like to see the sunrise?” urged the romantic Suzetta.

“No, not the first morning. We can do that any time. Besides, sunsets are easier — they are often preferable. Oh, dear, I do believe it looks like the kind of a place where nightingales would live. I believe it’s full of them. Perhaps it’s risky to even walk in the valley, for I don’t want to go home yet — just as I’m getting into France, where I can practice my French. It’s so dreadful. It needs all the practice it can get. I know,”

THE NIGHTINGALE

she added, — “we will never walk in the valley except between nine and three. I never heard of a nightingale singing in broad daylight. Then we’ll be safe.”

Comforted by this reflection, they rolled up to the inn, contented with life in general, a happy mass of smiles and fluttering veils.

A very brisk little maid, with merry dark eyes and curly hair rolled up high from her forehead, who was entering the door with a tray full of tea-things, came toward them.

“Oui, oui; very good rooms — with a view over the water.”

Hilda groaned.

“I don’t care so much for the view. I want sun and quiet. Well, yes, I think I do want the bay,” as she thought of the eleven little boats.

So they were shown in, and, going to bed early after a delectable dinner, decided they would stay there forever. As Hilda closed her eyes, little did she realize the part this quiet spot was to play in her life history.

The breakfast the next morning kept up the illusion of heaven. Suzetta came in and opened the long windows opening out on a little balcony. Only seven little boats (the laziest ones) were left in the harbor. Even they were begin-

THE NIGHTINGALE

ning to wake up. Hilda could see people busy about them. The sun was warm, so warm that Hilda had a clutch in her heart as she put honey on her roll. She wished she knew when nightingales sang in the Riviera, — she prayed that they never sang till May.

She decided to run over to Cannes that very day after lunch and buy a bird book. First she must explore the river, the very minute she was dressed.

“I do wish I had studied ornithology as a child,” she sighed.

Alas! when Hilda was young there had been no fascinating nature-study in schools. She grew up never knowing why a grasshopper hopped, or how an earthworm propelled itself out of the earth after a rain. She would learn what a nightingale looked like, when it sang, how it sang, where it sang. Then in every way she could she would avoid one. She simply would n't go home now spring was coming on. Oh, if Europe could be all spring! She had lived with numberless shivers through an Italian winter, she was n't going home till she had had a French spring and maybe an English summer — if she could elude the nightingale so long; though, thinking of Keats and Shelley and Wordsworth, she was

THE NIGHTINGALE

afraid the English country was full of them. It would perhaps be safer to stay in France. Ah, how Hilda loved France! She was so happy she sang one little *bergerette* after another as she dressed.

She peeped out of the window. Everything outside looked happy, too. She pulled on her heavy coat and leaned far out over her balcony. Little violets were at her feet. Farther down in the garden beyond the terrace were tangles of salmon-colored geranium.

“Oh, that’s where they get the flowers for their prim little bouquets! I wish I could take some roots home with me. Then I could always have two just like them on my own mantel.” Hilda was thinking of the quaint little posies she had noticed the evening before. Each day Madeleine put on the little shelf in the *salle-à-manger* two perfectly round, tight little bouquets in little blue vases. Each bouquet had a clump of pink geraniums in the center, and around it an inclosing ring of violets. Always the little bouquets were the same! Never, never were the little blue vases insulted by any more subtle or less geometrical combination. Hilda grew to love them so that for the first time in her life she wished that there were no Ten Com-

THE NIGHTINGALE

mandments. She wanted to steal. But she reflected: "I would be punished. The babies, or a maid, even if I got the vases safely home, would surely break them, and all my work would be in vain."

So Hilda did not steal the vases, or even ask Suzetta to. It is unfortunate to believe in fatality!

CHAPTER VI

HILDA usually dressed very quickly. This morning she raced. The thought of really standing in a flock of sheep, with their warm, pushing bodies all about her, really talking to the peasant, who stood so statuesquely gazing at them, filled her with a strange sense of adventure. Inside of half an hour she was with Suzetta at the beginning of the little path. They went hand in hand, like two children venturing into an enchanted wood.

“Oh, Suzetta, is n’t it beautiful?” she said, as they walked on. “It makes me homesick. It looks a little like a place in the mountains where I go when I am home. Every spring we go to fish for little bits of fish,—their name is trout. They ought not to be little, but they really are.” Hilda added this in explanation. She did not wish to injure the fair name of American trout. “Sometimes we fasten them up on a stick and broil them over a fire.”

An idea struck her. There must be fishing here.

“We will ask this man,” she decided. “I

THE NIGHTINGALE

wish he would take us. He would know the right kind of bait."

They approached the man, who looked up stolidly and then turned away. He was very surly-looking and evidently unsocial, for he began slowly to walk away from them.

"Oh, I am almost afraid of him, Suzetta; do you think he could hurt us?" whispered Hilda.

But she was determined that he should not elude her—especially now that she wanted to fish.

"It would be quite proper to go fishing with him," she thought; "for of course I'd have Suzetta, too."

She decided to see if she could make the man suggest it—then she would feel less bold.

"Good-morning," she said, walking rapidly to overtake him, and with Suzetta's aid deftly surrounding him, thus preventing his escape. "I have traveled a great deal,"—here Hilda gave semicircular waves of her hand to take in the entire landscape,— "and I think this is the loveliest place in the *world*. May I ask if you were born here?"

A second before Hilda would have said that the man's face was absolutely expressionless, quite incapable of showing any feeling whatever. But his face changed. Perhaps it was the

THE NIGHTINGALE

warm welcome we all instinctively give to any implied compliment. He may have been touched by the courteous juxtaposition Hilda gave to the beautiful landscape and his own birthplace. Though subtly put, it is strange how quick the most obtuse human ear is to catch the sound of flattery !

“No, madame,” he said. “I was born in Italy” — here Suzetta gave a little gasp of pleasure — “near Turin,” he added.

Suzetta’s face fell in disappointment.

“Ah,” she said, in rapid Italian, “if you could only have been born in the South. That is my home, Sorrento.”

The man shook his head.

“I came here when I was very little, not a year old,” he said. “I have never spoken anything but French. I wish I could understand,” he added, gazing sadly at Suzetta.

He seemed to gaze with added interest now that he knew they were compatriots. The words Italy, Turin, and Sorrento had shown him that.

“It is a great bond to belong to the same nation,” said Hilda suavely. “Americans find it so over here and I see it’s the same with you and Suzetta.”

As she said this, she observed that Suzetta

THE NIGHTINGALE

was gazing with open admiration at Jean, who was not at all bad-looking when he cheered up (as some men do) in the presence of ladies.

“I must not let them fall in love with each other,” she instantly decided. “He is nice, but not nice enough for Suzetta. I will not let them look at each other any more.”

“Oh, you have some baby lambs, have n’t you?” she interrupted.

He turned toward her. He began to have an almost social expression. “It just shows what sympathy will do,” thought Hilda. “Maybe he will take us fishing, after all.”

“Oh, yes, there are many lambs. New ones every day. Five were born this morning. Would madame care to see them? They are over in the sheepfold.”

“Oh, I’d *love* to, but not just now. We are so interested in this stream. It looks to me as though it had lots of fish in it.”

Hilda walked to the bank, and leaned over to look appraisingly at the water, much as a rug connoisseur peers at a rug; only she could n’t, of course, turn it over backward and count knots — besides, she had no magnifying-glass.

“I am very fond of fishing. I fish in America with my husband.”

THE NIGHTINGALE

“Ah,” said Jean Blanc, — such, he told them later, was his name, — “I, too, love to fish. Will not madame come with me some day? I am free after one on Sundays. If we go way up the stream, though it is not allowed, we are safe. I will not let madame be caught. I will get the bait. Sunday, if it is clear, — but they also bite well in the rain. Is madame afraid of rain? This is just the best season. If we wait, even a week, we do not get so many. And you fish, too?” he said, turning to Suzetta.

Suzetta, honest soul, smiled prettily.

“No, I cannot fish,” she said, “but I can sew.” This so he would know she had some accomplishments. “I would like to learn,” she added naïvely.

“Then it is all settled,” said Hilda. “We will bring the lunch and meet here at one — rain or shine. What do you like to eat? We must bring something you are specially fond of. Do you like chicken?”

Jean did not seem to realize she was addressing him. Evidently his wishes were not usually consulted. When he saw Hilda meant him, he said, “Yes, he would like chicken if there would be enough.”

“You shall have white meat,” said Hilda.

THE NIGHTINGALE

"Have plenty of bait, Jean. I always lose lots. Fish always nibble so terribly. I hope you won't mind putting it on for me."

Gallantry seemed to have been injected into Jean as with a hypodermic needle.

"No," he said, "I would like it. I have never before had that pleasure. I have always gone with men."

"It is too bad you cannot leave your sheep and walk with us. We are going farther upstream. It is so nice to be talking French. Can you understand what I say? My French is very poor."

Jean's was poor, too. It was such a patois, with such broad "a's" and such a strenuous accent, it was hard for Hilda to follow. Hilda's was understandable as far as pronunciation went, but her vocabulary was limited to nouns and adjectives and verbs which did not seem to fit easily into a fishing conversation.

"Perfectly, madame. You speak beautiful French. Good-bye," he added, as they both bowed.

"We shall see you perhaps before Sunday," said Hilda, "for we are going to walk here every day. Are you always here with your sheep?"

THE NIGHTINGALE

"No, often I am in other meadows. It depends on the sun. If it is hot I bring them here. Madame likes sheep?"

"Oh, I love them," said Hilda.

Here two baby lambs with bells around their necks scurried past her in a hurry to keep close to their mother, who had walked by in a stately manner the minute before, and was almost lost to sight.

"How darling," — Hilda laid her two hands on their necks. "Oh, I would love to have them for my babies," she said.

She could not think of the word for bells, so she patted their necks.

"I have two children in America."

What fun, she thought, to take them each a bell!

"Would it be permitted to buy two — would the owner allow it?"

Yes, Jean would arrange it. He would bring them to their hotel next day. Where were they staying?

"He hopes to see Suzetta. We could just as well get them here after he has permission. Still, he has been so nice about the fishing — we'll only be here a few days — he can't get very much in love." So Hilda mused.

THE NIGHTINGALE

"All right," she said. "That is very kind of you. You won't forget? We are at the Red Rose."

"Do you want little ones?" he called after her.

"Not too little," she answered. "If they're larger they'll be more useful," she thought.

"Very well," he answered. "I will pick out good ones."

"A very nice man," said Suzetta as they walked on up the stream. "I wish I could understand French. I think he had a very kind face when he smiled. Do you think he has a good business?"

"He is a nice man, Suzetta, probably a very good man. But I think he is poor — very poor — and I have a feeling his wife and babies don't get many luxuries."

Suzetta's jaw dropped.

"His wife! But he was so pleasant! Do you think he can be married?"

"That," said Hilda, "is the way men are. They can be pleasant even after they are married. Of course we will pay him for taking us fishing. I know he is poor whether he is married or not. He will be a guide. He will be glad to get the extra money. Maybe his wife will come, too," she added firmly.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Suzetta relapsed into silence. The rest of the walk had lost its charm for her.

“Poor child,” thought Hilda, “she is very impressionable. How lucky I have n’t a chauffeur. But maybe his being an Italian had something to do with it. I shall be glad when we are well into the middle of France, miles from the Italian frontier. I see I must n’t stay here very long.”

The next morning they drove to Cannes and bought three bird books. None of them said much about the nightingale. Hilda was disappointed. Those irritating Europeans who seemed to think every one knew as much about nightingales as they did themselves! She must remember to ask Jean — maybe he could describe its song and tell her what it looked like. Probably there were thousands of them in the valley. She would ask Jean when they sang. She must surely leave in plenty of time.

The next day it rained. Nothing had been seen of Jean. He had not brought the bells. Hilda felt rather cross about it. It was not a long walk, and he ought to keep his promises. Perhaps he had been ill, or perhaps his master was away and he could n’t get his permission. They would know next day, for it was Sunday.

THE NIGHTINGALE

About twelve Hilda and Suzetta started from their little inn, each armed with a lunch-basket from which protruded the neck of a bottle, very alert and straight, like a sentry stationed on guard to scent danger and see that no harm came to the lunch proper. All over the top of the basket were those jagged elevations which always occur in lunch-baskets, giving the surface a sort of contour-map appearance. Hilda could hardly wait to unpack it and see Jean's joy. Madeleine had been told that Jean was to be in the party, and to put in *plenty*, so the surface evidence of a substantial meal was very gratifying.

They met Jean a little way up the stream. He was sitting on the bank arranging his tackle, and he advised lunching farther up the river. They would be nearer the fish. So they all trudged along, single file, till they found a pretty place under some poplars.

The conversation, like the chicken, was somewhat disjointed. But Suzetta looked admiringly at Jean between every bite, which, as we all know, is often the pleasantest kind of conversation.

Hilda, by dint of many ably worded and ardently uttered questions, learned much about

THE NIGHTINGALE

Jean's simple life. He ate two entire chickens, had a bottle of wine, and seemed much refreshed when he got up.

The fishing was like any other fishing where one starts out with too high expectations. There were nibbles, even a few bites. One fish, as is always the case, was almost brought to shore. He disclosed quite leviathan proportions in the hasty glimpses they had of him. He was on Suzetta's line, and she was highly elated at her success.

"Jean is a good teacher," she said to Hilda. Even if the fish did n't reach land, she had had the thrill of feeling a real tug on her line, and that is about all there is to fishing. That and the placidity it imparts to the nerves! Whether one fishes lazily,—merely sitting in a sort of hunched-up bunch in the end of a boat, or on one's feet, idly threshing up and down a stream,—or whether one takes it in a fast and furious spirit, with snapping alder branches, and swiftly running currents swirling about one's be-booted legs—either way it is soothing. The effect on one's soul is the important thing, and that is always the same. Calm, unruffled calm! Nothing else in the world so smooths away dull care as turning the whole weight of one's intel-

THE NIGHTINGALE

lect on the right kind of bait, the best way to cast, the most seductive and alluring type of fly!

Then there is the joy of discovering new pools, unequaled even by the pomp and circumstance incident to discovering an ocean as did Balboa, or a continent as did Cortez. The joy of exploration is latent in every soul. If one cannot have big adventures it is well to get thrills out of little ones.

CHAPTER VII

AS they walked back late in the afternoon Jean said, "I did not bring the lambs, as my master was away and I had to wait and speak to him about it. I could not tell how much they would be. They are five francs when he sells them to the butcher, but I could not tell when it was a lady."

Hilda's fishpole fell from her limp fingers. It was a pole — not a rod. I will not be corrected by any fancy angler. It was cut from a tree that very day, and was simply a long, thin stick.

What could that nice Jean be talking about? She had n't bought lambs — she had bought bells. What would she do with two lambs? She looked at Suzetta inquiringly. But Suzetta was looking at Jean and had no eyes for Hilda.

"Yes," continued Jean, "I have thought and thought which lambs to give you. They are all gentle, but some are stronger than others. I have gone over the whole flock, and yesterday went over the mountain to a larger flock my master keeps at another farm. There I found two very white ones. They are prettier than any

THE NIGHTINGALE

in this flock in the valley. So I got a friend to drive me back with them last night. Madame shall have them any time she likes. My master said I was to present them to the strange lady who liked sheep, with his compliments. He will hope to see her himself before she leaves. At present he is at the other farm."

Hilda was thinking hard. How could Jean have got such a crazy idea into his head? Then she remembered she did not know the word for bells, and that she had patted the lambs' little woolly necks from which the bells hung on strings, and said, "I wish two of these for my children."

She saw now she should have clutched the bells firmly and waved them in Jean's face. Of course, it would never occur to Jean that she would carry those two ugly, harsh, jangly little bells for thousands of miles and give them as presents. Of course he thought she wanted the lambs for pets! The difficulties of transit probably never occurred to him. Peasants always have faith that the gentry can achieve anything, and any European, whatever his station in life, believes that American enterprise can vanquish every obstacle!

It was her own fault. She had not been defi-

THE NIGHTINGALE

nite enough. She could never hurt Jean's feelings, — he had taken so much trouble, too, — by telling him he had misunderstood. She stood between Scylla and Charybdis: on the one hand, the difficulties of lugging the lambs all over Europe, — Hilda fairly wilted away with despair when she thought of it; on the other, the impossibility of letting poor Jean see his mistake. What would he say to his master after going to him, troubling him, perhaps when he was busy, to ask the price? He might blame Jean for being so careless, and not taking messages correctly. He might even discharge him!

Altruism conquered, as it always should.

"You are very good, Jean. I had no idea it would give you so much trouble. I only hope I will know how to take care of them. You must tell me exactly how to feed them. Every few days we will stop and let them browse about in pastures. And every day we will stop at least twice as we pass a meadow and let them get out and frolic. Traveling is hard for people — but it must be harder for lambs. I will try to be good to them. It is a great responsibility."

Hilda's voice died away as her spirits sank.

"Oh, they are strong," replied Jean. "They are very frisky. Madame will soon love them.

THE NIGHTINGALE

And the food is easy. I will explain everything. If madame is worried, why could n't she stay in Agay for a month or two, and I will look after the lambs till they are past their babyhood."

"Oh, that would be lovely. But I do not dare stay. I am afraid of nightingales. It is so hot here they may sing any minute. It is well into February now. I must hurry North and keep ahead of them. I do not want to hear one sing till — anyway, the middle of June. Then," she added, "I might be willing to go home."

It was Jean's turn now to drop his pole.

But he was a less nervous nature, and simply grasped it a little convulsively for a second and threw a questioning glance at Suzetta, as much as to say, "You know this strange lady. Will you explain her to me? Even though I understand her French, I do not understand the things she says in it."

Hilda saw the glance. The worries connected with lambs were nothing to the worries she would have about Suzetta if she got interested in Jean. She decided she must leave Agay at once — the next morning at latest. Hilda, as we know, was used to quick decisions, and rather liked the excitement of a quick change of scene.

"It is too long to explain about the nightin-

THE NIGHTINGALE

gales," she said to Jean. "I hardly understand it myself. But we must be going. We have to hurry on to Paris. I need some new dresses. I am in rags."

This she felt sure Jean would understand. Every man knows that the fundamental need of every woman is more raiment.

Jean seemed satisfied with this explanation. The strange lady was simply a normal, everyday woman after all.

"I will bring them to-night," he said, "or perhaps you would rather have me bring them tomorrow morning, just as you start. I may perhaps be a help getting them settled in the car."

"Oh, that will be lovely," said Hilda. "If they are nervous, if the motion of the car bothers them, you can sit on the back seat and hold them and quiet them till they get used to it. We must have a nice, big, comfortable basket for each of them, with soft blankets in them, so they won't get bumped."

Jean said he could bring two baskets and some old pieces of carpet that would do till Hilda found something better. He seemed pleased at the thought of the ride.

"We will start at ten," said Hilda, "rain or shine. I will have a note ready for you to take

THE NIGHTINGALE

to your master to thank him. You have both been so good. To-morrow at ten punctually. Do not forget."

Suzetta and Jean exchanged lingering glances, the fishpoles were laid in an orderly heap in Jean's hand, and Hilda and Suzetta scudded home in the dusk, looking like two little children who have played out too late and expect to be scolded when they get home. They had to hurry, for there was a good deal of packing. Hilda wondered as she ran if she dared ask for the little blue vases!

At 9.30 the next morning Bucephalus stood ready in the road. All their luggage was neatly packed away. There seemed plenty of room left for the lambs. Hilda was quivering with excitement. Suzetta, having stowed everything away in the car, was in the house giving a final adjustatory pat to her hat, so as to make a last favorable impression on Jean as she whirled away in a cloud of dust. She wished to remain a pleasing image in his heart, even if he had a wife and children.

When she went out to the car Jean was there. He had driven the lambs over in a little cart. Hilda decided it would be better to let the lambs stand up in the tonneau and have Suzetta and

THE NIGHTINGALE

Jean sit on the seat, each in charge of one lamb, while she ran the car up and down to see how they liked it.

“If they seem frightened, I shall have to leave them behind,” she said. “I cannot be so cruel as to make them uncomfortable.”

They started. Hilda took great risks, and kept turning around every second to watch the expressions on the lambs’ faces. If they looked scared, she would jam on the brake at once and take them out. But their little faces showed no expression whatever — nothing, that is, beyond the look of calm and settled content which was habitual to them. They did not even look at the scenery. They simply looked at each other. They seemed to say, “At least we are together, the blue sky is overhead, kind people are patting our backs. Our environment is peculiar, but why worry?”

Hilda was delighted. She saw this would be no fiasco. It would be a grand success!

After about fifteen minutes’ gyration up and down the road, Hilda stopped the car, and Jean and Suzetta jumped out. They arranged the lambs comfortably in their baskets. Hilda gave Jean the note for his master. Then it was time for their good-byes.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Jean stepped up to Hilda as she sat at the wheel and took off his cap.

“It has been very nice to know madame. I am sorry the fish did not bite. If madame will allow it, I will never forget her. She is the first person in my whole life who ever asked me what I would like to eat. It has always been the same thing each day, — the same things to eat and the same things to do, — till madame came. I hope the good saints will give her happiness.”

Suzetta could not understand. She wished she could. Jean walked up to her.

“Good-bye,” he said, “you fished very well. I hope we may fish again some day. Perhaps you will come back. I will always be here, so you can find me.”

He helped Suzetta climb in the car.

Hilda decided he was n't married, after all. Maybe she had been too stern. He certainly looked up at Suzetta as though he loved her. Poor Suzetta could not look. Her eyes were in the depths of her handkerchief.

Alas, life is full of just such partings!

As the car started with a rush and roar, Hilda turned to Jean.

“Suzetta will send you many postcards, so

THE NIGHTINGALE

you will know where we are. She will not forget you, I know."

They rolled away, and Jean stood there, his cap in his hand, a blot of blue in the dusty road. Then he turned and went back to his flock and stood day in and day out watching them. But his thoughts were far away. He would often, after thinking a long, long time, say "Suzetta" half to himself; then give himself a little shake, take a step or two, and stand again, like a statue, wrapped in his cloak. Stupid and dull they all thought him at the farm. The old mask of stolidity was once more on his face.

That afternoon about four Hilda and Suzetta stopped at a pretty little house where the grass looked good under the trees, and asked the mistress if they might rest there and have their tea, and Hilda added, "May our lambs play about and stretch their legs? They are not used to motoring," she explained. "I am taking them to America to my children."

"I have children, too," said the woman. "May they come out and play with your lambs?"

That would be lovely, and the mother must

THE NIGHTINGALE

join them at tea ! So, behold, there was a nice impromptu party.

It was a pleasant homey little scene. Hilda looked at the lambs and thought how Lætitia and Paul would love them.

“I shall have to hurry home,” she thought. “I musn’t stay away too long — they will be too grown-up.”

As they sipped their tea, they talked. Suddenly the woman said, “What do you call your lambs ? They are so white they must have pretty names.”

“Snow-White” and “Snow-Drop” popped into Hilda’s head. But there was some bread and butter in her mouth, and she had to wait a second to speak.

What she said was, “Scylla and Charybdis.”

CHAPTER VIII

HILDA had had a pretty strenuous week. The lambs made her traveling a shade more complicated, and she resolved to push on quickly through Provence.

She wanted to get the trip North over with and settle down in Normandy for the summer. She would study French and swim in the Channel (very near shore, of course), the lambs would keep on growing, Suzetta would sew and learn English. It was just the nice, simple sort of life she wanted. She reveled in the very thought of it. But, good gracious, of course she could n't do it, after all, for there was the nightingale! Long, long before summer really came she would surely have heard one; she was almost sorry now that she had ever made that ridiculous promise. Still, she knew nothing about its song. She would n't know one if she heard it. The Cannes bird books were no good at all, and nobody seemed to be able to describe it at all intelligently. Like the sun and moon and other objects about us which we assume as part of the universe,

THE NIGHTINGALE

and then think no more about, so with the nightingale! No one ever seemed to have given it a second's scientific thought. "Eternal passion, eternal pain." That is what it stood for. And how can that be analyzed and described?

They had motored on from St. Raphael past Hyères and Sollies-Pont. They were working slowly up the valley of the Gapeau looking for a black thread of a stream which Hilda had noticed in the guidebook. There she contemplated giving the lambs their weekly bath. Never, never again would she do it in an inn. That experience they and also a long-suffering landlord had lived through once. Any one who has attempted a bath at any inn in Europe can imagine the utter misery—the waste of time, patience, and money involved in bathing Scylla and Charybdis, even superficially. The miseries and discouragements of a thorough bath are beyond expression! Still, they had to be scrubbed. Suzetta and she both felt that whatever other concessions they might make to the exigencies of travel, out of mere respect to law and order, the lambs ought to be bathed and generally spruced up for Sunday. Besides, to-morrow was St. Agnes's Day, so they were planning a special *fiesta*.

THE NIGHTINGALE

It was a hot day, and Hilda was afraid the lambs would feel the heat. She remembered in stories and pictures lambs were always under trees, or on the cool banks of a stream, so she stopped at a peasant's house and had him put up the top. Whenever the top was up, her spirits were in inverse ratio to the obvious dejection of the car, so they raced along in great spirits. Toward noon they came to a shallow stream, a tributary of the Gapeau, a sort of weak-kneed and weak-minded rivulet, which seemed uncertain where to go or how to proceed, but as they followed it up, it grew more and more agreeable, till suddenly it became enchanting, and at the same second she and Suzetta decided they must get out and enjoy it.

They took the lambs out and snapped their leashes, if such they can be called (about thirty feet of tether per lamb) to their collars. Then they spread out their lunch,—sardines and cold chicken, a salad with dressing in a little bottle, a flask of wine, some fruit. The lemons for the sardines made Suzetta think of Sorrento. Lemons led to oranges. She talked in vivacious Italian all through the meal, describing with great gusto the wonderful fruit at

THE NIGHTINGALE

Sorrento, the wonderful feats of all her five little brothers both at climbing and picking. Hannabale, aged fourteen, was the fastest worker in the village. He had once taken a prize offered by the priest. She described the thousands and thousands of boxes all ready to be shipped away.

Oranges — a stupid, subconscious association led the current of Hilda's mind to grape-fruit, and with one of those queer instantaneous and unconscious ramifications of thought, the breakfast table at home flashed into her mind. She saw the steaming coffee, the children's valiant efforts to keep from spilling their cocoa. She could smell the bacon. She could see a general assortment of brown eyes and brown hair. She began to feel homesick. Everything suddenly bored her, and she felt like crying. She hated lambs. She hated Suzetta!

So she rolled up in her rug, fished out her handkerchief, and spoke to Suzetta.

"I am going to sleep for ten minutes. Then you must wake me up, for we must bathe the lambs in time for them to play an hour or so and get their circulation going before we start. They must be perfectly dry and warm before we begin to drive." Hilda had always been a

THE NIGHTINGALE

good mother, and it had been excellent training for lambs.

In an hour's time (Suzetta had a sort of trained-nurse side to her character and felt it was wrong to waken any one who needed sleep), Hilda opened her eyes quite on her own initiative, and saw Suzetta taking off her stockings and rolling up her dress. She was still too sleepy to say anything, she simply looked. She saw Suzetta lead Charybdis into the stream and, standing in water about halfway up to her knees, begin spattering him and rubbing him hard with her strong little hands. Hilda looked sleepily at the west — she knew where it was, for she looked toward the sun. She saw it was getting late, and they would have to hurry.

“Oh, Suzetta,” she called, “you were so wicked not to shake me and make me wake up. I will get right up and bathe Scylla. We must hurry. It's late.”

She rolled out of her rug rather unwillingly ; she was so cosy and warm after her sleep. She hated to take off her stockings, too, and stand in the cold water. Still, that was the quickest way to do it. The lambs must be bathed. She rolled up her skirts and started to untie her shoe laces.

THE NIGHTINGALE

“ Oh, Suzetta, we have no soap. How stupid of us not to have brought some. We will never get them clean.”

She looked sadly at the lambs. She did so want them to shine white and effulgent, like toy lambs in a shop, for the *fiesta* to-morrow.

“ I know. We will have to use my new soap. It is wicked. It cost three francs a cake in Cannes, but we will have to use it. Go get two cakes out of my dressing-case in the car. We will each have to have one.”

Hilda sighed. She had made many sacrifices for the lambs. She had changed her plans, she had worked for their comfort, often when she was nearly dead with fatigue herself. She had tried to give them a happy childhood, as happy as childhood can be without fairy stories ; that joy they would never know. But the soap was the greatest offering on their shrine that had yet been made. It was such a waste ; the thriftiness which is hidden away somewhere in every modern soul, the heritage from hard-working ancestors more or less distant in the remote past, cried out to heaven against such extravagance. Still Hilda did it. She grasped Scylla firmly by the collar and preceded him into the stream, pulling him very reluctantly after her. About

THE NIGHTINGALE

six feet out from shore was a rock which, though not flat and not very big, could, thanks to Hilda's lifelong habit of balancing on one foot, serve quite adequately as a seat. Here she perched with her legs curled up under her. All that was necessary was to keep her feet out of the water and herself on the rock. She pulled Scylla up alongside it, and in the thoroughness of her splashing and rubbing did not notice a big limousine which tore down the road and passed on toward Sollies-Pont. A few minutes later a man of perhaps sixty in goggles and motor toggery was seen walking toward them. He came up to Hilda, who was sitting on her rock, her hair flying, her cheeks and her eyes bright, very wet, and very much wrapped up in her efforts to clean Scylla's neck well under the collar. Lambs' necks, she found, meant as much squirming as the same process when applied to little boys.

He bowed and began : —

“We have lost our way, evidently taken a wrong turning. I see you have a car and have come from the opposite direction. I thought perhaps you would be so kind as to help us.”

At this juncture, Hilda, who was much more

THE NIGHTINGALE

interested in Scylla's neck than in the gentleman's remarks, looked up at him squarely.

A light of startled recognition came in both their eyes.

"Why, Mrs. Maneley! I am surprised," said the gentleman.

"Oh, Mr. Wetherby, whatever are you doing in Europe? This is so lovely." And Hilda leaned across Scylla's back, and extended a wet, soapy hand to Mr. Wetherby, the senior partner in Horace's firm.

"Are you playing goose-girl — or rather shepherdess? I am glad, though, that you are. It means that your aunt is better. You must have had a long anxious winter in Munich."

"Munich — Munich! What made him think she had been in Munich?"

Hilda had quite forgotten the particular explanatory scheme she had outlined to Horace in that scraggly letter of last October. Suddenly she remembered. She knew her face had shown astonishment when he said "Munich." He must have seen she did n't know what he was talking about. All sorts of plausible stories raced through her head, she had a very inventive mind, but she thought: —

"No. He may discharge Horace if he knows

THE NIGHTINGALE

he is married to a liar. No, it is too late. I must tell him the truth."

She leaned even harder on poor Scylla's back, who stood as a sort of bulwark between her and Mr. Wetherby. She tucked her feet even higher up out of sight and addressed Mr. Wetherby as he stood on the bank gazing benignly at her.

"There was no aunt, and there was no Munich, Mr. Wetherby; I just ran away for a lark. Horace was very sweet. He did n't mind at all. But I was afraid people would gossip, so I asked him to tell that story as a sort of conventional excuse for my absence. You understand, don't you?"

Hilda leaned upon Scylla so heavily that she almost toppled him over in her anxiety to have Mr. Wetherby understand clearly the tangled web of deceit she had woven four months before.

Mr. Wetherby looked rather astonished and extremely puzzled by this outburst of confidence. Words did not seem to spring to his lips in his embarrassment, so Hilda continued:—

"I am, unfortunately, in my bare feet. But I do want to explain it all to you. Do sit down under that tree,"—Hilda waved at a tree about thirty feet inland,— "and I'll put on my stock-

THE NIGHTINGALE

ings and tell you. There will be such millions of things to ask about. You can tell me all about Horace and the children."

Mr. Wetherby still looked a little uncertain as to what was the proper thing to do under these strange circumstances, but he bowed again politely, and, evidently thinking the situation called for a woman's tact, said:—

"I will go tell Mrs. Wetherby you are here. She would not miss seeing you for worlds. We shall both want to hear your adventures." He gazed at Suzetta and the lambs as though he expected them all to be explained later.

"He is very unemotional. I wish he were more jolly about it — it is going to be very hard to tell him. I wish I had just made something up in my head. Now he will think Horace is married to an idiot. It is a great misfortune being so honest."

Poor Hilda!

A sudden idea struck her as she laid the soap on the rock in order to get a firmer grasp on Scylla's collar.

"Oh, Mr. Wetherby, have you — would you mind looking to see whether you have any ivory soap you could lend me? Maybe your chauffeur has some." This as she thought of

THE NIGHTINGALE

the fastidious Mrs. Wetherby. "If he has, *would* you ask him if he would loan me a few rubs from his cake. I cannot get these lambs clean."

Mr. Wetherby turned and went off at a brisker pace, as we all walk when we have an end in view, a *terminus ad quem* to give the walk a fillip, and shouted back he thought they had some. They would search in all their bags. He would be back in a minute with Mrs. Wetherby.

There was no time to waste. Hilda waded to shore, pulling Scylla, who really looked very immaculate, after her. Hilda had worked with both speed and system, and he showed that a high order of intelligence had gone into the job. Again he was attached to his leash and allowed to gambol about and get warm.

"He ought to be dried with a bath-towel — but we have n't time till I get fixed up," said Hilda. "Suzetta, Suzetta dear, come here quick and help me. Just let go of Charybdis, he won't drown, he's all right — no," she got frightened as she saw Suzetta obey and leave Charybdis standing braced against the current and thought of the diminutive size of his four little legs, "he will be safer on land. Bring

THE NIGHTINGALE

him to me — you must help me find my stockings. Do hurry — I know those people in the car, they are old friends — I've got to talk to them. I *must* have my stockings. I can talk so much better when they are on." — "What would Horace say," she thought, "if he could see me now? It is too ridiculous. Why do I do such crazy things?"

CHAPTER IX

IN a few moments Hilda was sedately seated looking at the landscape; seated on the bank, not on the rock. Scylla was browsing near her and Suzetta stood in the stream still scrubbing away at Charybdis. Hilda had hardly assumed a look of perfect ease and unconcern when Mr. and Mrs. Wetherby appeared, the chauffeur in their wake.

“We found some soap and we have brought Napier to help bathe the lambs, so you will feel free to talk.”

Hilda shook hands warmly with Mrs. Wetherby and turned to Napier:—

“This is very good of you,” she said. “It will be a great help, for it is really hard work—much harder than driving a car. Suzetta, here is some one to help you. I think you would better work together at Charybdis—he will be finished quickly then, and can scamper about to get warm. Then Scylla will have to go back for a final polish.”

“You are very good,”—she turned again to the Wetherbys,—“to loan me your man.

THE NIGHTINGALE

This is the first time I've tried bathing them outdoors — it's not been specially successful. But I am so pleased to get soap. I never wanted anything in my life as I wanted that soap."

"Not even your husband?" said Mrs. Wetherby. She was a tall, stately woman, with gracious manners and an equally ungracious view about those who stepped outside the pale of convention. "Don't you wish all the time he were here? Don't you need his help about the money and the customs and all the red tape with your car?"

"No, I have n't missed him a bit," responded Hilda. "I am very busy all the time and have n't a second to think about anything but my new responsibilities. In one way and another," she said, gazing at Bucephalus, Suzetta, and the lambs, "I've assumed a good many. But I am getting very strong and well and that's what I left home to do. I was tired of being an invalid. I felt I needed new interests."

"You seem to have acquired them," commented Mrs. Wetherby. "It is quite an unique collection. And when are you going home? I have n't heard Mr. Maneley say."

THE NIGHTINGALE

"When I hear a nightingale sing," answered Hilda. "I will have to begin at the beginning and tell you everything, it is so mixed up. You see we don't write each other letters. At least we write them, but don't send them. I'll explain it all later. First, tell me are they all well?"

"Ripping," said Mr. Wetherby. "Stunning — they all have red cheeks, they are all gaining two or three pounds a week. Yes, they're all well. I think Horace never looked better." He was a polite man. He did not want to worry Hilda.

Reassured about the family's health, Hilda proceeded to unfold her itinerary for the last four months.

"Now to-night I am driving on to Bandol," she said. "There we may stay a few days if we like it, but I want to push on to Normandy as fast as we can for the sake of the lambs. This traveling is bad for them. Scylla is not as lively as a lamb ought to be. It may be he's homesick, so I try to distract his mind with new people and things. That is the classic cure for all mental ills, is n't it?"

"I must go get a closer look at those lambs," said Mrs. Wetherby at this juncture. "Their

THE NIGHTINGALE

names are enchanting." She walked over to where Suzetta and Napier, having finished Charybdis, had again captured the unfortunate Scylla, and were giving him a final massage. She left them alone purposely. Mr. Wetherby had looked as though he wanted to have a tête-à-tête with Mrs. Maneley (maybe he would give her a little wholesome advice), or perhaps he accomplished his wife's departure by *not* acting as though he wanted to see Mrs. Maneley. Mr. Wetherby was a wordly-wise person, very clever at attaining his ends. With Mrs. Wetherby out of the way—she had seemed a shade disapproving and had been a slight damper on Hilda's good spirits—Hilda ran on in her account much more blithely, and Mr. Wetherby listened in a more receptive mood. He began to get Hilda's point of view. He began to see she was really doing a very plucky thing to dare work out her salvation in her own way. He began to see some of the joys of getting off by one's self, and having one's own particular kind of a holiday with no one—fond relative, or kind friend, or well-wishing acquaintance—to give advice or put forth a restraining hand. He thought sadly of his own ineffectual efforts the winter before to get away by himself—he had thought

THE NIGHTINGALE

of a quiet three weeks' trip to Panama (what more simple and inoffensive than that?) and it had called forth a chorus of disapproval and hostility from the entire family. "Who ever heard of any one going away alone for a holiday? especially when he did n't feel well." This argument prevailed and he had taken his trip escorted by his wife and three tangoing daughters.

In his soul he quite envied Hilda her happy freedom and that spontaneity of action that is never attained unless one is quite unimpeded by relatives.

"You have a very infectious spirit," he said, when Hilda had finished her narration. "You make me long to lead an adventurous and picaresque life myself!"

Mrs. Wetherby returned from Scylla and Charybdis.

"I am tempted myself to pick up some unusual pet," she confessed rather shamefacedly. "It gives one a fresh thrill in life. You are really quite a tonic, Mrs. Maneley. We seem hopelessly commonplace and unenterprising to simply take a normal, everyday kind of trip. I wish you would join us for a week or two and show us how you get so much fun out of life."

THE NIGHTINGALE

"Oh, you just pick it up as it comes along," said Hilda. "You really have to grab it. You just have to reach out and catch things on the wing. You don't even have time to think. All these things," she gazed about over Scylla, Charybdis, and Suzetta, "I just took on the spur of the moment. If I had weighed all the pros and cons I should probably still have been ill in bed in Sorrento. It is very wholesome, I think, to do lots of idiotic things. Only very sensible people dare to,—because you have to be perfectly oblivious of other people's opinions. You must n't be the least bit afraid of what people will say: they can always say unpleasant things, so I just made up my mind on this trip to consult nothing in the whole world but my own whims and fancies and let criticism roll off my back like a duck. Everybody has been awfully kind," she added. "It's been a grand success."

"It certainly has," said Mrs. Wetherby. "You look about sixteen." She turned to her husband, "I think I shall run away, too; perhaps if I have good luck and seize the right opportunities people will think me only forty-five."

"You are exactly right just as you are, Matilda," said Mr. Wetherby fondly. "I would

THE NIGHTINGALE

feel so much older if you looked younger. No, you must not change. We will just try to inject a little of Mrs. Maneley's enthusiasm into our old veins and try to be a shade more frisky as we go about. We must give up stopping at big hotels. Fresh experiences are more fun than everyday comforts."

He turned to Hilda: —

"I shall be writing Horace within the next few days. May I tell him we have seen you and how well you look — or, can't he even have that bit of news? Of course, I shan't give a hint as to where you are."

"Oh, I should be so glad to have him know I'm all right — you see, I don't even know he has got my cables. I just trusted people to send them and sometimes people forget. It would be very good of you."

They chatted along for an hour or so, and then Hilda remembered that all her "new interests" would have to be housed for the night. So the good-byes began.

"It has been so lovely to see you," she said as she stood pulling on her gloves. "We must have a reunion when we all get back to America and compare adventures. I pray every night I will have some but they never seem to appear."

THE NIGHTINGALE

"The lambs," suggested Mrs. Wetherby.

"Bucephalus," said her husband.

"But I mean thrilling ones," said Hilda.

"However, thrilling adventures are pretty ordinary nowadays. They are in every book, — even Mother Goose. I believe it is more unique to have simple ones. Besides a big adventure might land me in a dungeon and it is pleasanter to spend one's holiday out of doors. Be sure to tell Horace," she concluded, coming back to the immediate subject of good-byes, "that I am **REALLY** happy. He may think it says so in the cables just because I promised."

Suzetta, with Napier's help, was tucking the lambs into their baskets and rolling them up in their rugs. Everything seemed ready for the start, so Hilda jumped in the car, then looked back for a last farewell. She suddenly felt very much alone. But she only said very gayly, "Good-bye and good luck. I envy you so going on to Italy. Be sure to write Horace." A confusion of waving hands for a second or so, then Hilda threw in her clutch and Bucephalus sped away toward Bandol.

That evening, after a somewhat creaky table d'hôte, Mr. and Mrs. Wetherby sat on the ter-

THE NIGHTINGALE

race of a quiet little inn at St. Tropez. They were both tired and simply waiting for Mr. Wetherby to finish his cigar for them to go to bed. But it was pleasant on the terrace and they talked on for some minutes — that quiet kind of rambling talk that makes one feel soothed and calm. As they were rising to go up to their rooms the conversation drifted back to Hilda where it had started.

“It is, of course, unusual to drop one’s home responsibilities so easily,” said Mrs. Wetherby. “Still I believe it was the right thing for her to do. And she is so happy over her holiday — quite Pippa-esque about it. She has done something for us, too, as she flitted by. She has given us the best talk we have had in years.”

She leaned over and softly patted her husband’s hand as it lay spread out on the arm of his chair. She had a rush of the same feeling she had had years before when as a bride she waited impatiently for him to come back to her after his day’s work at the office.

“We have grown so accustomed to things and to each other,” she said; “we must begin over again to be happy. We must ‘make-believe’ more and get more illusion into our lives. We are contented, but we are not really happy

THE NIGHTINGALE

— we must put real joy into everyday things, not merely do them in a routine way.”

“ We will begin this minute being reckless,” said her husband ; and with hardly more than a hasty glance about the terrace he leaned over and kissed her — rather timidly — on the cheek. It was a new experience. They seldom indulged in caresses. “ We are not too old to begin, are we ? ” he said ; “ a honeymoon is just as sweet at sixty as at twenty — sweeter, for it is a more understanding love.”

They rose a second time to go to their rooms, but instead they walked for a long time back and forth on the terrace. “ It has been a wonderful evening, has n’t it — a page out of our youth,” said Mr. Wetherby, and once more, as they turned to go in, he leaned shyly over and kissed his wife gently on the lips.

And Mrs. Wetherby looked as young as Hilda as she smiled up at him.

CHAPTER X

LATE one afternoon Hilda and Suzetta drove into the little town of Vaison. It had been a lovely drive up the valley of the Ouvèze, but a pretty fussy one. They had had a little trouble with the engine ; then, besides, it had been a very hot day, and Hilda looked forward to a bath and dinner with impatience.

" Maybe," said Hilda, as they drove slowly into the village, " at that last garage they did n't put oil into enough places. Did you count ? Don't you think the car squeaks a little ? I'm sure it does. I've heard it several times."

I regret to say that Hilda was one of those daring women who run a car without knowing anything about the details of its internal construction. She simply knew, because she had watched Horace so many times, that there were six places in the hood where one used light oil.

" Yes, I counted," said Suzetta. " It was right. The man put it in five places."

" There ought to be six," said Hilda, in a worried tone.

THE NIGHTINGALE

"Oh, then I am sure it was six," Suzetta was always affable. "I must have made a mistake. Yes, six, I am sure. I know it was right. Do not worry, signora."

But Hilda felt a little troubled. Perhaps she had given Suzetta too much responsibility. She had the care of the lambs, and the packing, and the oiling of the engine — a good deal of executive work for one mind to grapple.

"We will look before we put Bucephalus to bed," said Hilda, half reassured. "Maybe we trust to these mechanics too much."

"Oh, no," said Suzetta; "they are all such nice men, I am sure they would never do him any harm. It was probably the heat."

"Bucephalo," as she called him, was a real person to her.

"Well, you see about the lambs. Scylla looks tired. See that they have plenty of supper and tell the man to give them soft beds."

They were now at the inn. Hilda herself decided to have some tea and then examine the car. A pretty little terrace was built out on the bank of the stream, and here she settled down, took off her glasses and gloves, and gazed about idly as she waited for her tea. There were several tables, and at one of them sat a man with

THE NIGHTINGALE

various papers spread out in front of him which he was studying intently. Though less susceptible to men in general than Suzetta, even Hilda had to acknowledge he was a "nice man." He was tall and well built, with merry eyes and a certain debonair distinction of manner that was very engaging.

"Oh, dear, I would love to talk to him, but I suppose I can't," said Hilda to herself. "He looks so interesting. Perhaps we know some of the same people. Then it would be so wonderful. I am really quite lonely for some one to gossip with."

Her gay conversation, the fun of a little repartee which she had enjoyed for such a brief space with the Wetherbys made her long for conversation a shade more subtle than Suzetta's, which was conversation more or less reduced to its lowest terms. With her adroit engineering capabilities she could undoubtedly have arranged some sort of a chance encounter, but Hilda was extremely discreet in her behavior and decided she would never get beyond throwing an admiring glance or two at the good-looking stranger as he leaned over his work.

"He looks so jolly. It is unfortunate. Suzetta would be amused if she could read my

THE NIGHTINGALE

thoughts. We are quite alike, after all," thought Hilda.

She finished her tea and hurried out to the car, leaving in her hurry her goggles and gloves on the table.

Bucephalus stood rather disconsolately in the little court-yard. She lifted the hood and gazed into its greasy depths. She pulled out from the tool-box her working-gloves and began dropping oil wherever there seemed a place for it to go.

"Oh, dear, I'm afraid it's the grease-cups. I will have to see. I know how they look when they are right. If they don't look like that, of course they'll be wrong — that's simple enough."

She got down on her knees behind the car rather gingerly, for she was trying hard to keep her dress clean. She was at an awfully uncomfortable angle, and kept as far from the car as possible — very much the attitude a doctor assumes when examining a patient down with a contagious disease, trying to get a good look, but not taking many chances. As she got up rather awkwardly from her cramped position she beheld the charming stranger, whose approach she had not noticed, gazing at her speedometer.

THE NIGHTINGALE

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I hope you will excuse my rudeness. I was interested in your mileage. I drive a car, too. You made a long run to-day, 210 miles."

"Oh, I don't change it every day, the way I should, perhaps. I just change it when it comes into my head."

She walked over to the speedometer and gazed at it. "I have n't changed it for ages. Not since we left Nîmes. You must have thought me a furious driver," she added.

"Any one could see madame was an experienced driver." The man said this with a little bow. "I am glad you are not a methodical one. They are all alike and very tiresome."

The man had started talking in German, but dropped into English when he saw that Hilda answered in that language. He had a fascinating accent.

"He is not German. What can he be?" thought Hilda.

"Then you can't tell me the mileage you get out of petrol with this car," he continued, — "an average mileage, of course. I am thinking of getting one of this make. They are very good for runabout use. How do they take hills?"

THE NIGHTINGALE

"Bucephalus is an angel. She flies up them as though she had wings."

As she said this, an idea struck Hilda. She certainly liked this loquacious stranger. She remembered her promise to Horace. Alas, to be true to her word she must put on those ugly — those unbecoming goggles. Could fate have been more unkind?

"Pardon me," she said. "I will tell you about the car when I get back. I forgot my glasses."

She came back with them astride her nose — she had not even a little hand-mirror to help her to get them on at a good angle. They were simply put on "any old way."

"Ah, if I had known madame had trouble seeing the concealed parts of her car, I would have helped her. I have very good eyes, and I would like to learn more of this engine."

He leaned over it with the air of a man who can tell a good carburetor when he sees it.

"I see your trouble," he said, almost instantly. "The oiling may have been neglected, but your real trouble is the fan belt. It has slipped off."

"Oh," said Hilda, rather weakly. She had no idea what the fan belt did, or where it was. Instinct prompted her to say, "I hope it is not hurt."

THE NIGHTINGALE

Hilda, too, leaned over the hood and peered in. The gentleman slipped the belt into place, and Hilda handed him some clean waste to wipe his hands.

"It is wicked to ruin your handkerchief," she said.

As she handed it to him, she looked up. The man seemed to notice her goggles for the first time.

"It is a sin," he observed, "for madame to have to put those on unless it is extremely necessary."

"Yes, I think so, too," said Hilda. "I hate to — but I promised — I promised my husband I would always put them on whenever I saw any one I liked very much — any man, I mean."

Hilda felt a shade embarrassed. She was always so frank it never occurred to her to be careful how she phrased her remarks. But the man looked at her very sharply as she said this; she did not know that perhaps in all Europe there was no one so clever as he at reading people's inmost souls. The peculiarly searching quality in his glance lasted only the merest fraction of a second — a rather relieved light crept into his eyes, and he looked extremely amused.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Hilda was perfectly unconscious of having said anything that could possibly be interpreted as daring. It was simply a plain statement of fact, — the kind of thing a straightforward child of seven might have said, a child with, perhaps, a slight inheritance toward flirtation, but still a perfectly unconscious, matter-of-fact remark. It was n't what she had said, — she would n't have given that a second thought, — but the quick, piercing glance the man threw at her that made Hilda pause. She was not used to that type of appraising glance, or to appraisalment of any sort. But the man was evidently reassured and went on in the same gay spirit.

“Where, if I may ask, is this fortunate husband to whom you made this most unfortunate promise? That is,” he added, “if he can be called fortunate when he is evidently separated from you.”

“He is in America,” said Hilda, glad the conversation was back in a safe domestic channel. “I also have two children, Lætitia and Paul. They are very beautiful.”

“I can believe it,” said the strange gentleman. “Are they like wild flowers?”

“I don't know,” said Hilda. “They are often wild, and they are lovely, like flowers, but they

THE NIGHTINGALE

are too sturdy. Wild flowers make you think of something fragile."

"Even though they are so strong, it must be a sorrow to your husband that they are not like you," said the gentleman.

A pause ensued.

"What do you think of the engine?" said Hilda. "Do you like it?"

"Yes, I think it looks very competent. But a little light car like this has lots of vibration, has it not?"

"No. Not if you put on shock-absorbers. That is what I should have done. Would you like to try it? Do get in and run it for ten minutes or so."

"I am not familiar with it. You are very kind. I might get into difficulties—perhaps give you trouble with your clutch. No, I thank you very much, but it is too risky. It would be too bad to cause you any trouble later."

An idea occurred to Hilda.

"Let me take you," she said. "I'd love to. I was tired when we got here, but my tea has made me feel like Hercules. I will drive it out for a mile or so, and you can drive it back. It is so simple, it will only take a minute or two to get the idea."

THE NIGHTINGALE

Hilda jumped into the car, and the man cranked it and got in beside her.

"This is such fun," said Hilda. "I do love adventures."

"So do I," said the strange gentleman. "This is a new kind. Since you are good enough to put me in your debt to this extent, may I introduce myself? My name is Von Arnim. My home is Vienna. If you will tell me where you come from in America we may find friends. I have many acquaintances there."

"Now I will see how much you know about America," retorted Hilda. It was such fun to be talking to such a charming and responsive person. "Do you think I seem like Boston, or New York? Or the South, or the West?"

"If you wish to know exactly what I think and will not be offended, I will tell you."

"If you don't mean Pittsburg, or Leadville, or some other millionaire place," said Hilda. "You can see I am poor."

She looked lovingly at Bucephalus, the scars of battle visible all over the cushions, the mudguards, the hood, and the poor lop-sided top, whose lop-sidedness was unfortunately very conspicuous at this moment, because it was up.

"No," said Von Arnim. "I was not thinking

THE NIGHTINGALE

of any of those places. I was thinking of the kingdom of heaven."

Hilda was extremely astonished, and felt a little uncertain just how to take this remark.

"There is a great deal of play in the wheel," she said finally. "I hope you are not nervous." Her tone was rather dry.

"Not at all," said Von Arnim. "We were speaking of heaven. The reason I said that was that if you remember your Bible, it speaks of children, and it says, 'of such —'"

Hilda felt better. She was afraid he had meant an "angel." She had done him a great injustice. He was too nice to make such a stupid compliment as that. A "child" was different. It was being frank, the way she was herself. She was reassured, and they chatted along in the jolliest way for ten minutes or so.

Hilda offered him the wheel. He had been intently observing her use of the throttle and spark, the clutch and the brake.

"No, thank you. I do not want to drive, unless you are tired. I would much rather talk. It is not often I have such a pleasure. Other women are different."

He looked up at the straight little figure at his side; so alert, so friendly, so absolutely

THE NIGHTINGALE

fearless and self-reliant, so trusting as she looked around at him through her goggles.

“Do you know,” he suddenly said, “you make me think of the Bible in other ways. How do you say it in English? ‘Thinketh no evil’ — ‘Unspotted by the world.’ I have seen a great deal of the world, and I am a good judge. It is perhaps not usual to talk like this on a slight acquaintance. But I go on to Paris to-night. I shall not see you again. It may seem awkward to try to put an impression into words. But I must tell you the pleasure it has been to meet you. Nothing in the world is so rare as a personality. And when one finds it, it is so seldom a beautiful one. It has meant a great deal to me.”

They were turning into the little courtyard.

“Yes, I shall get one,” he said. “You have given a very good demonstration. You have shown me something, too, besides the car.”

“Yes,” said Hilda, “you have seen the country. It is such a pretty valley. I wish we had had more time. It is too bad to leave just as we are getting acquainted. I shall tell my husband how my driving has made a new convert for this car. He is always laughing at my

THE NIGHTINGALE

driving," added Hilda. "He thinks I am so cautious and throw out my clutch too much going around corners."

"It is well to be careful. Perhaps your husband criticizes your driving because he finds nothing more serious to criticize. I have hardly time to catch my train," he said. "I must hurry." He jumped out and turned to say good-bye to Hilda.

They shook hands, and he looked up at her. Through her goggles she gazed at him with the friendliest of smiles.

"It has been such fun showing off my car. I shall always remember you. It was nice of you to like it."

Herr von Arnim smiled back.

"I shall remember my drive, too."

He paused a minute, then he added, —

"I have a little daughter. I shall tell her about you. Some day you must know her. Her name is Christina, and she is just the age of your little girl. Some day they must meet each other. Good-bye once more."

He looked up at Hilda a second and then walked quickly across to the open doorway. Hilda drove the car into the shed and went up to her room. She undressed. She was very tired,

THE NIGHTINGALE

so went directly to bed and had her dinner sent up to her.

She lay a long time before she slept, thinking of the strange gentleman.

“He was so nice. I wish Horace had been here. Then we could have planned all to meet again. He is a nice person. I hope I shall see him again.”

Hilda began to see that there are certain freedoms one has when a husband is along that can't be engineered so well in his absence.

“I do so hope I shall see him again, and I couldn't tell him so. But I have a feeling,” this thought proved consoling, “that we shall meet again and be friends.”

CHAPTER XI

HERR VON ARNIM settled himself comfortably in his compartment. He would not reach Paris until the next morning. It was not a bad run, but there was always that stupid wait at Lyons. From there another line went on to Geneva. After disposing of his luggage, he started to read, but the book was uninteresting. He decided to look out of the window till he got sleepy.

The landscape was very pretty as it flew by the window. There was a lovely light in the sky. He thought of Hilda and the woman he was going to see in Paris. Plain, unassuming little Hilda, so merry, so unhappy about her goggles, so unconscious; and the girl to whom for two years he had given the very cream of his life. What was she? Beautiful? Yes, very beautiful. Young? Yes. Kind? Sometimes. Loving? Only so long as money flowed freely — only until she met some one who attracted her more. Good? In a way — in a great many ways — she had many, many good and lovable qualities. Charm? Yes, a studied charm. She was an artist

THE NIGHTINGALE

both in dress and manner. An inspiration? Never. That really was the difference. Hilda in this chance meeting had, in a few minutes' talk, started currents of feeling he had thought were dead. She had stirred something in his spirit that was to carry him along with it into new channels: something had been planted, or rather brought back to life, in the very depths of his nature.

He thought of his little daughter in Lausanne, tucked away in a school where she would be safe and properly brought up. Her mother had died when she was a baby — she had only him to plan for her. He went there occasionally on a sort of necessary pilgrimage — more because he believed in a father's living up to the proprieties of parenthood than because he felt any particular interest in the child as a personality, or any sense of spiritual companionship and sympathy. For some reason now he felt he would like to see her. She might be like Hilda. It would be nice to be with some one like that, to have a person like that care for you. He realized sadly the utter lack of affection there was between him and Christina — absolute lack of acquaintanceship. Perhaps that was the reason for lack of affection.

THE NIGHTINGALE

The train was approaching Lyons, the junction for Geneva. Herr von Arnim tumbled his bags together and got out. As he scrambled into the train for Geneva he handed two hurriedly written telegrams to the guard. One to Paris read : —

“ Find it impossible to be in Paris again till fall. Letter follows.”

The other went to Geneva, to the head mistress of Christina’s school : —

“ Am coming to take Christina with me for long holiday. Kindly have her things ready to-morrow.”

The next day when he saw Christina she looked up at him with the same frank pleasure he had seen in Hilda’s eyes. She was too afraid of him to rush up to him as a child naturally would. She merely looked as though she would like to love him if she dared.

“ That I must work for,” thought Herr von Arnim. “ It’s the most precious thing I can have.” And not once in the long, happy summer did he regret Paris, — not once in his whole life was he sorry he had chosen Christina.

CHAPTER XII

IT is really a pity Paris is in France. If it were farther away, say in Germany, and harder to get to, people would spend more time in the French country, not gravitate so unerringly toward the capital. As it is, something pulls, pulls toward Paris. It is hypnotic. You plant your feet firmly, and say, "I will stay here forever, it is so lovely. I can never, never leave this place." This speech could be made in thousands of places in France. But Paris just laughs in her sleeve, and before you know it some restlessness within makes you decide to move on. You always move in one direction. Usually you take your ticket straight through.

If Paris is an old friend you know what that thrill will be as your train rushes the last ten miles or so into the heart of the city! When you think of it, you cannot wait, — your feet tingle to start. It is a sensation quite unlike any other in the world. O Paris, why is it not enough to dictate our fashions? Why must you dominate our hearts as well?

After leaving Vaison, Hilda pushed along

THE NIGHTINGALE

pretty steadily, through Avallon and Auxerre, toward Paris. She decided to take rooms in some little village half an hour or so out of town, where the country air would be better for Scylla and Charybdis, and was hoping she would run across some one to advise her. If nobody turned up, she would go to Giverny where she had been before. After three or four weeks there (she planned to settle with kindly people, so she could leave the lambs safely and jaunt about with Suzetta), she was thinking of going on to Normandy — perhaps to Veules-les-Roses. Then she could run over to England from Dieppe, leaving Suzetta with Bucephalus and the lambs, and have a few visits with English friends. That would simplify matters, for she could sail for home from any one of the French ports. What she would do with Suzetta and Bucephalus she was leaving to Fate. The lambs would go with her. Fortunately the duty on wool had been removed.

Hilda had forgotten the adage which begins, “Man proposes —”

The stay in Giverny was a success, at least so far as Hilda was concerned. She and Suzetta were n't there very much. They browsed about the country, ran over to Chartres, and motored

THE NIGHTINGALE

more or less erratically through the Loire country.

She was away for ten consecutive days. When she came back she noticed that Scylla was less frisky. He stood disconsolately about, and though he brightened up temporarily when he saw them, his mood of listlessness soon returned, and Hilda saw something was seriously wrong. She inquired about the food — evidently her instructions had been followed to the letter. Nothing could be more wholesome-looking than the pasture where they played. Could it be the water? She had n't had it analyzed. Everybody else looked well. It could n't be that. Perhaps Scylla missed the excitement of travel. Some temperamental souls need a certain amount of excitement to keep in good health. Perhaps it was the traveling and not the lack of it which caused the trouble. Maybe it had been too "jouncy" in the tonneau. Hilda knew there was more motion there than in the front seat. She should have stopped at Marseilles and had shock-absorbers put on! She was in despair! Perhaps Scylla was growing too fast, and needed a tonic. He had an affectionate, demonstrative nature and threw off a lot of energy. Charybdis was much more quiet and dependable. Scylla

THE NIGHTINGALE

was the sort of nature that might develop any minute into a genius!

It was a special problem, such as at times confronts all parents and guardians. It needed special consideration.

Hilda had an inspiration. She had heard of Southdown mutton. There was evidently a place in England where the climate was specially salubrious for sheep — a place that would do for ailing sheep what Homburg or the Engadine or Aix does for people.

Hilda decided to take the lambs to England. She would start at once!

The lambs were getting rather big for their baskets, and she would find a nice little English farmhouse where they could live quietly till the nightingale sang and she started for home. She would not make them travel any more. It would be a short run through Normandy — the Channel, of course, would be a simple matter — and then they would be in England!

But how to find this farmhouse? She could not take the lambs to a London hotel. They would have to be left with Suzetta in some little town, while she went on ahead to make arrangements. Then they would skirt around London. She hardly liked to drive Scylla and

THE NIGHTINGALE

Charybdis through Picadilly and the Strand—even her adventurous spirit hesitated at that. She decided to leave them at Canterbury. The cathedral would be a diversion for Suzetta, the Kentish landscape would be a good setting for the lambs. She herself would push on to London and interview Giddy & Giddy—that enterprising firm whose advertisements stare one in the face, from the first spy-glass vision of England as the steamer approaches Liverpool to the last blurry view one gets over his shoulder as he starts out bravely to cross the Channel—that adventure of adventures to all English minds. Why, when they can conquer Armadas, do they tremble so at half an hour's *mal de mer*? But perhaps they are right, after all, for was it not a wind sweeping up the Channel—quite as much as Drake—that vanquished Spain and gave England her victory?

Hilda gave up various dressmaking projects she had contemplated in Paris, and rushed on through Normandy, though there were all sorts of heavenly things she wanted to do.

“Never mind,” she said to herself; “I will come again later with Horace and the children. The lambs I will leave at home. It is my duty to be good to Scylla. If it were not for me he

THE NIGHTINGALE

would have been living in peace, happiness, and health at Agay. I must sacrifice my own selfish desires for his well-being."

As Hilda had foreseen, the Channel was a simple matter. It was fairly smooth, anyway, but, not knowing that there was any danger of unpleasant sensations, Scylla and Charybdis experienced none, and were their normal, well-behaved selves all the way over. In fact, they accepted things so intelligently that it was all Hilda could do not to take them, as one always does a child when on board a steamer, and show them the machinery. She refrained, and they curled themselves up in their baskets and slept.

The crossing made a welcome break in Hilda's busy life, for Hilda's responsibilities these days made her a pretty active woman. Gone were those care-free days when she sat up in bed and ate a grape-fruit and then curled up for another nap. The lambs were asleep. Bucephalus was stowed away on the lower deck. Suzetta felt the motion, and was lying limply in the cabin. Hilda walked up to the bow and looked toward England.

"I cannot look back at France. If I did, I would never leave it," she sighed. "I would jump overboard and swim for shore. But I sup-

THE NIGHTINGALE

pose if I did some horrid sailor would jump, too, and rescue me. It is really hard," she mused, "to have any adventures at all nowadays. One is so surrounded by people who don't understand."

This was the first time Hilda had got away by herself for months. Something about the cool, salty wind, the mere act of bracing her body against it made her feel extraordinarily enterprising. She stood there wistful and intrepid. She would have loved to lead an expedition somewhere — to Greenland — to Thibet — to Zanzibar!

And yet, though she felt adventurous, Hilda also felt sad. She had been so very, very happy in Italy and in France. Would there be happiness in England, too? Would her days there be the same slight sylvan little annals they had been, or would she run into some yellow fog of disillusion — something that would break the charm? Her trip so far had been an almost miraculous success. Hilda had been transformed from a pale, tired-looking woman to a fresh, girlish-looking creature, so full of life and health and spring that her feet barely skimmed the ground as she walked.

Hilda looked down at the waves dancing all

THE NIGHTINGALE

about her in the sunshine. She thought of Paul and Lætitia. They, too, loved the sea. She could see them running up and down the beach in the warm sunshine, their little slim bodies so wet and shiny, a general air of periwinkles and seaweed about them. She remembered what fun it was to help them explore big rocks, and to sit gazing far, far out to sea — three infinitesimal spots, all about them the blue sky and blue sea, behind them a great crumpled mass of yellow rock, beneath them the long, narrow slit of white sand.

Hilda decided it was just as much fun to have adventures at home as abroad. She began to think more cheerfully of the nightingale. She kept on thinking about the children. She thought of them now in town. She wished she knew the difference in time — then she could tell what they were doing, maybe popping corn, or perhaps Lætitia was making a cake for her doll and painting the top so it would have red icing. Maybe they were playing "Old Roger."

It would be so lovely when they were all together again in that dear little house where, even though she had lived mostly in bed, they were all so happy.

Here a sudden, bomb-like thought came to

THE NIGHTINGALE

Hilda ! It was a darling house, but there was no room in it for the lambs ! It had only a mite of a back yard and a patch of green hardly ten feet square in front. They would have to move. She thought hurriedly of possible locations. They would need a good, big yard, preferably with trees. Perhaps Horace would n't want to move ! It would be a great bother doing it, too. Well, she would n't worry about it now. She would just keep the idea in the back of her head. She knew a house that would do — the Morrisons'. Horace had often said he liked it as they passed by in the motor. There was a sun-dial in the garden. The children would n't have to run in to learn the time. It had many substantial advantages. It could be done when the time came, if necessary. The idea of giving up the lambs, not taking them to Paul and Lætitia, never once entered her head.

She hurried back to them now to relieve the sailor who was keeping an eye on them while Hilda had been taking her whiffs of salt air. He hustled away. They were nearing shore and Hilda went down to see how Suzetta was faring. She looked pale and wan, but even in her agony she asked softly if the signora and the lambs were all right.

THE NIGHTINGALE

"I prayed you would be," she said. "The saints are good. It is nothing that I am ill."

The slight tremor of the turbines suddenly stopped. The shaking and pitching had been lessening for some time.

"Here we are in England. Come on deck, Suzetta. The air will make you all right in five minutes. Don't worry. I can attend to everything. Just lie still in this chair and stay here till I come back for you. I want to be sure everything about the car is all right."

Poor little Suzetta, who, indeed, felt very woebegone and strangely limp, was tucked comfortably in the car as soon as it was off the boat, the lambs were disposed in their baskets as usual, an obliging porter cranked the car, and they were off.

Hilda had to drive cautiously, for on the Continent, as in America, one turns to the right, and here Hilda had to remember to drive English fashion, so they started out slowly. But the new way soon became automatic, and they rolled into Canterbury without accident.

Already Hilda was experiencing that delicious feeling of being able to express one's thoughts with fluency and dispatch that comes to most Americans when they reach English

THE NIGHTINGALE

soil after a sojourn on the Continent. It was so nice to be talking in English with real speed, never having to stop to readjust sentences and try to make them more understandable.

Hilda stopped over at Canterbury for a couple of days. It was so restful, so English, — that one word which embraces so many desirable qualities, — she could not bear to leave to go on to London, even though it was an old friend and she loved every inch of it ; which is only another way of saying she loved it immeasurably, for as we all know it is the biggest city in the world.

CHAPTER XIII

AT Giddy & Giddy's a very nice clerk, with that fog-cleansed English look no American can hope to aspire to, came forward. Hilda was sorry Suzetta was not there so she could have explained that he was a type; that whenever she thought of an Englishman she must think of that kind of eyes, that color of hair, that color of skin. Perhaps it was as well Suzetta was in Canterbury. She had a susceptible heart, and this dapper young clerk, so blue-eyed, so rosy and be-tubbed-looking, might have wrought sad havoc.

Still, as regards Suzetta, Hilda did not foresee any love affairs in England. Suzetta had the usual Southern temperament, warm, affectionate, responsive. The absolute lack of response, the cold, critical exterior which characterizes all Englishmen, would freeze poor Suzetta's heart to the core. Englishmen are like wine that is too cold, — a little difference in temperature would often be such an improvement.

This clerk, as I said, was very English. Besides that, perhaps included in it, he was very

THE NIGHTINGALE

polite, and "BUSINESS," and "TIME IS PRECIOUS" were written all over him in large letters. With this palpably commendable attitude toward time, he seemed to Hilda far from quick at catching her ideas. Perhaps she presented them strangely.

"I came to inquire about property," she began. "I wish to get a house."

She was wondering how best to lead up to Southdown mutton.

"Ah, country or town?" replied the alert clerk, trying to corral the idea, so to speak, and get it where he could manage it.

"Well, I suppose country," Hilda vouchsafed. "What I am really looking for is a climate."

"Ah," said the clerk again, this time with a slightly different intonation.

"Ah," he repeated a little more vaguely. He was giving Hilda time to proceed. In his limited experience he had never met a demand like that. He decided to fence for position.

Hilda said nothing. She looked up at him expectantly, as though she thought he might bring out samples of climate and lay them on the counter for her to inspect.

"What kind of a climate do you wish?" he

THE NIGHTINGALE

asked politely. "We have a great many different kinds. There is the Thames valley, the Hampshire country, Kent and Surrey" — these he dismissed casually. Every American, however ignorant, is supposed to know them. "Then we have downs, the Norfolk Downs, the Sussex —"

"That's it," said Hilda, greatly cheered; "I believe that is the place I want to go, where they raise the Southdown mutton. That," she continued, "is surely a healthy place for sheep."

"England," replied the clerk, "is healthy everywhere. Wherever you go you will find healthy people. But," he added, "it is the food we eat more than the air we breathe that makes us a great nation."

Hilda was determined not to sidetrack the conversation to beef. She was more interested in mutton.

"You are a wonderful people," Hilda observed. "You are so wise, since you cannot have mere size, — physical size, — to go in as a nation for quality. It is impossible to have both. Still," — she evidently didn't want to discourage the United States, — "still, when the quality you wish to attain to is not ex-

THE NIGHTINGALE

quísite or précieuse, — not, so to speak, the result of intensive cultivation, just mere greatness, — perhaps it is possible to attain both.”

After constructing this loophole, she felt better about the future of her own country.

As Hilda was indulging in this little byplay of fancy, the clerk was gazing with great concentration at a map of England, as though he would like to evoke from its red and black lines a location fitted by art and nature for sheep.

“May I ask if you have large flocks?” he said suddenly, looking up with a slightly puzzled expression. “Do you enjoy this industry? It is a novel pursuit for a woman.”

“Sheep-raising? Oh, I have only two. They are pets. Their names are Scylla and Charybdis.”

At this the clerk somewhat automatically clutched at the counter for support. He looked anxiously toward a fellow clerk busy at a ledger some ten feet away, as though wondering whether if he called for help it would arrive in time.

“I am just a mere ordinary American,” continued Hilda. “We all love your country so. We would love to be in it every spare minute

THE NIGHTINGALE

of our lives. I do hope you have something on your list that will suit. It must have a garden and casement windows. That and the air are all I'm extremely particular about. If it could be near a church so I could hear bells I should like it, and I should be so happy if I could hear water falling over a weir. We do not have that word in America," she explained, "so I should like to experience it."

She stopped. Evidently that was the sum total of her requirements. The clerk murmured something about all those things being more or less taken for granted in England.

"Oh," Hilda burst out, "I forgot the most important thing — sunshine. Every room must be sunny."

"That is impossible in any house," said the clerk, with great conviction.

Here he was sure of his ground. The peculiar twists the lady gave to the conversation would not bamboozle him here.

"Every house must have some north rooms."

"That is almost axiomatic, but not quite," replied Hilda. "It all depends on the angle. Most people don't think much about it, and put the house down wherever the trees, or the road, or the mason and carpenter seem to think best.

THE NIGHTINGALE

So long as on the plan a lot of rooms look south, they are satisfied. But it is perfectly possible to set the house a little off the straight lines of the compass, then every room gets sun — perhaps not full force, but at least on the bias. My house in America is like that,” she went on. “It is wonderful. Every room is just as pleasant as every other. It is like Socialism.”

The clerk said he was afraid they had no data on their books about the angles at which the houses were set.

“Well,” said Hilda, “I will waive that point. We will have to get a house big enough to stay out of the north rooms. But everything else I can get, I suppose.”

“Oh, easily.”

“English people are so lucky. They have all the things as common, everyday matters that we struggle all our lives to acquire. I suppose every house has a nightingale. Tell me,” she continued, “do you know anything about nightingales?”

“I have heard dozens,” responded the clerk with enthusiasm. “Every Englishman has.”

“That’s another point where you excel us. Not a dozen Americans ever have. I forgot. I’m sorry to trouble you with any more requirements, but I must be near a nightingale.”

THE NIGHTINGALE

At this the clerk looked thoroughly discouraged.

"Well, at least in the same county, or 'shire.' Your word is so much prettier. I am sorry, but you will have to add that to the list of requirements."

The clerk's eye was running over a tabulated list of estates large and small.

"Would you like a view of the sea?" he said.

"Yes, I think I would," said Hilda.

"That," said the nerve-racked clerk, looking slightly cheered up, "makes the search easier. We shall only have to look at the coast property."

"I am glad the Midlands are eliminated. They don't sound very enticing. And the lakes are too Wordsworthian. No, I want the sea."

Gradually the conversation narrowed down to such mere details as price, length of rental and other normal, businesslike considerations, and the clerk's businesslike expression returned, to the great joy of his facial muscles, which had had to look mildly or wildly astonished for a much longer time than they were accustomed to.

The clerk's fear seemed to have vanished as he saw signs of returning normality in Hilda's

THE NIGHTINGALE

conversation. He saw now that he dared look up at her, that she looked a good deal like any other lady. (Horace would have said he was strangely lacking in discrimination.)

"The Southdown mutton," Hilda said softly. "We must not forget that."

"Oh, yes, of course," — the clerk again feared a slight excursion from mere business highroads. "We do not often meet with inquiries of that kind in the everyday routine of business."

"Probably that, again, is the novelty of the angle. I am looking at this little house I want to get from the point of view of sheep. Most people think of houses from the point of view of rooms, their size and number — or the stables and kitchen garden — the outlook — the neighbors — or the distance from the station. Angles are very important things," Hilda summed up.

"I see they are," said the clerk, smiling for the first time with a light in his eye.

To his relief, and perhaps a little to his grief, now he was beginning to understand the lady, the conversation seemed to be drawing to a close.

"Oh, one last requirement," said Hilda. "It must be cheap, very cheap. I rather recklessly bought a motor-car without a word to a soul, so I am poor. Above all, I must economize."

THE NIGHTINGALE

Once more her conversation descended (like a monoplane sliding gently down to earth after a little turnabout up in the air) to mere business details.

"If you will be so good as to prepare a list of places that you think might do, I will stop in to-morrow to look them over, and will inspect two or three of the most promising. In a week's time I ought to be settled."

"Yes," said the clerk. "I am sure we can find just the right place. Your requirements are not so difficult, after all."

"No," replied Hilda. "It is a happy knack to be able to boil things down."

With which epigram she left Giddy & Giddy, and dashed off in a great hurry to buy a new pair of driving-gloves which she sorely needed.

In two weeks Hilda, Suzetta, Bucephalus, and the lambs were installed in Stoke Pero, Somersetshire.

Hilda had to give up Sussex because she could not bear to walk on the downs and look toward France. Her heart was still sore from the sacrifice she had made for Scylla. All "downs" must be healthy, they were all high, they all had bracing air. She would have to find

THE NIGHTINGALE

some with a less depressing outlook. So after exploring Ringmer and Glynde, the very heart of the Southdown country, she returned disillusioned to Giddy & Giddy.

"I must have downs where — when I walk on them — I do not look south. For personal reasons I cannot look toward France. Whatever else I give up, I must have downs which look north."

"Wherever one is, there is always a view toward the south," suggested the clerk, who under Hilda's ministrations was developing a wonderful ability to look at a question from all sides.

"No, there is one place — the South Pole," said Hilda, softly; "there everything is north — but unfortunately it is not feasible. Besides, I would get muddled about the sun. With no east or west, where could it rise and set?"

Her mind flew northward from the pole and hovered once more over Great Britain.

"Dorset and Devonshire would n't do, would they?" she inquired. "I'm not quite sure where they are."

The clerk glanced again at the map and decided that here he could make an uncontrovertible statement.

THE NIGHTINGALE

"They are out of the question. They both look toward France." The lady could see for herself that the Channel lay at their very feet.

Hilda looked at the map. Somerset caught her eye.

"What about Exmoor? I like the name. I'm sure it must be healthy."

"We have hit on the very spot," cried the excited clerk. "I once spent a bank holiday week-end in Exmoor. It is good country and I have a house near Porlock on my list. But it's a long way to go to inspect it."

"Oh, I will take it without looking at it." Hilda's tone was conclusive and resigned. "I have never had so much trouble in my life as I've had about this house. I'm not going to bother about it any more. I'm sure with your recommendation it will be all right. All life is a lottery, anyway. I like its being so far away. Sussex is too near London. This is a splendid location with moors all about. I need miles and miles of open country about me, so I can take long breaths."

She inquired the price.

"If you will give me a pen I will sign the lease now, then it will be off my mind. I want to run out and buy a new Verhaeren. I am in

THE NIGHTINGALE

a great hurry. When do you think I can take possession?"

"As soon as you wish," responded the light-hearted clerk. The goal was in sight. He had lived to see the strange lady sign the lease.

In half an hour the business arrangements were satisfactorily completed.

Hilda thanked the clerk for all his kindness and patience in dealing with a somewhat difficult problem, and withdrew.

The clerk folded up the map of England, collected his scattered papers and somewhat scattered wits, and returned to his desk.

Was he glad to get back to mere routine law and order? Had the wells of tradition been a little stirred? All he knew was that beneath his British waistcoat was a strange feeling of expansion — a seething force was inside him. Ah, he had it, — beneath the placidity of his waistcoat buttons a new angle of vision was being born. He prayed the buttons would hold — not be torn from their moorings in the struggle. He was strangely disquieted! Something had happened, but he could not analyze it; he could not tell how or why!

Then he thought of that haven of refuge, tea, and was comforted.

CHAPTER XIV

SUZETTA had learned a good deal in her two months in France. For one thing, she had learned, as Hilda said she would, much geography. She knew the rivers, the Rhone, the Loire, and the Seine. She knew the general lay of the land, its hills and dales, villages and cities; she knew the Riviera — at least she had a bowing acquaintance with it, which is all many people care to have — she had seen Paris. There most of all she loved the quays and the bridges, the gardens and some of the quaint old churches that Hilda loved, too, which made her think of Italy. In addition to that “culture” which the most galloping tourist is supposed to acquire, she had made rapid strides in English; had even acquired some facility in reading and writing, for Hilda had taken pains to teach her as systematically as she could, and had encouraged Suzetta to read harder and harder words, till by the time the Channel loomed in front of them Suzetta was quite able to conduct the ordinary affairs of life in the King’s English.

Yes, Suzetta knew many things besides

THE NIGHTINGALE

“sewing.” But of them all, one thing stood out preëminent. That she had learned, as we learn most things, through bitter disappointment. She had observed that whenever she met a man and commented to Hilda on his charm of manner or person, she was instantly whisked away and no further opportunity to meet the object of her regard was presented. Had it not been so with Jean at Agay, and again with Signor Wetherby’s chauffeur, and again with a specially entrancing shopkeeper whom she had seen in Toulon? Always they left immediately! Upon one thing Suzetta was resolved. Cost what it might, the next “nice man” to whom she felt attracted would remain a secret locked in her breast.

On one subject, at least, she would keep her own counsel. If God were good and she found in England another who looked at her as did Jean and the chauffeur, and who seemed to wish to do things to help her, she would not risk her happiness and pave the way for immediate departure by mentioning her estimate of his character to Hilda.

At Canterbury, in Hilda’s brief absence, nothing particular happened. The men about the inn were a shade too old to be romantic.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Suzetta was quite willing to leave the cathedral to go on to London and Stoke Pero, as eager as Hilda to see the little house which was to be *home* to them and the lambs.

Here, however, fate soon appeared in the person of one Peter Harub, who drove with exceeding stateliness of pose and demeanor an equally stately equipage. Within it, as it rolled hither and yon upon the landscape, sat a most unstately spinster, a Miss Stebbins, an eccentric lady of about fifty who refused, like Hilda, to be fettered by convention and tradition — who had, indeed, once or twice broken away from the dull monotony of her existence and done strange things. Once, she had openly announced, she thought of going to the Caucasus to study its flora, but fortunately a sprained ankle intervened and she was obliged to stay at home in her quiet domestic rut. She had an extremely inquiring mind, and was interested in every kind of progress, in every sort of innovation. She had installed a patent dish-washer (which had broken most of the china). Rumor also said she had bought an electric iron, but it had had to be put aside in the attic; for when she got home she remembered she had no electricity. Now village gossip said she was think-

THE NIGHTINGALE

ing of getting a motor-car. That would mean discharge for Peter, for, of course, she would want an experienced chauffeur; but though he often quaked inwardly, not knowing at what moment the blow might fall, outwardly he preserved that same haughty and impassive demeanor. His unruffledness was the admiration of the whole countryside! But beneath that stout exterior was a heart. It had a good normal beat, had, in fact, so seldom been quickened in action by the presence of youth and beauty that Peter could almost be said never to have been in love. Once a lady missionary who spoke at a chapel meeting, who was leaving for China the following week and trying to raise funds to finance the enterprise, caused it to flutter. She was pretty, and had a great flow of language. (Peter talked little himself.) He had felt drawn toward her, and had a slight feeling of envy of the Chinamen who would be in her classes. Peter felt a strange yearning to keep her in England and take her for a drive some pleasant evening. But that fervid desire passed. The young lady went to China—at least she left—and in time Peter forgot her.

Peter was, externally, very methodical and repressed, and seemed perfectly contented to

THE NIGHTINGALE

go through life gazing straight ahead of him at the sleek backs of his horses. But his mind wandered far afield. He had always been interested in geography. He went to all the illustrated lectures on foreign countries that were available. Miss Stebbins's cousin, who was a great traveler, had kindly consented to speak that winter before the Band of Hope at the chapel, and Peter had learned much of Italy, Greece, Egypt, and even of India and Japan. All Englishmen have a natural bent toward geography, the result, I suppose, of their large holdings in colonies. If we had only remained a colony they would know more to-day about "The States."

Therefore is it any wonder that when Peter one day in the village saw Suzetta sitting beside Hilda and heard her speaking in a foreign tongue, — alas, he knew not whether it were Spanish or Italian, but Suzetta wore no mantilla, so he thought it was Italian, — his interest flew at once to white heat. He himself was on his way to the post-office; these ladies were in front of the chemist's. Rumor said that an American lady had taken the white cottage two miles down the road. Miss Stebbins's house was, unfortunately, three miles in

THE NIGHTINGALE

the opposite direction; but his interest being aroused, he had made a wide *détour* on his way to the village, and swung past it to take observations.

But all the gain of this expedition was that he noticed as he drove by two lambs browsing under the trees, two ladies with backs turned toward him working in the distance (could it be possible?—they seemed to be making a dog-house—at least they were hammering at it), and, most exciting of all, in the driveway at the side of the house stood a small motor-car, its top up, with a perceptible droop on one side, over the driver's seat.

Every gallant corpuscle in Peter's body bounded in his veins. He had heard of no man in the American lady's employ—he would have heard unless she had brought one with her. Perhaps the ladies had had to put the top up themselves and been unable to manage some heavy strap and buckle. His orderly soul hated to see the car looking so lop-sided when all it needed to make it comfortable and self-respecting was a man's strong hand. But still he hated to offer his services. The American lady might not like it. He would wait. Perhaps through the butler or Miss Stebbins's

THE NIGHTINGALE

maid he might hear more about them. Fate, however, decreed that he should meet them himself that very day and that they should prove an important, a very important, factor in his life.

After seeing them in the village, Peter decided he needed some black-currant cough drops for a slight indisposition in his throat. On leaving the post-office, he proceeded to the chemist's. As he went in, the American lady passed out. But, rapture! the foreign lady remained. He had to wait, one always does at a chemist's for somebody else to be served, while she picked out a toothbrush. She was very particular — not hard, but medium, was what she wanted. Finally it was wrapped up and paid for. She started for the door. Peter fell back instinctively a step or so, though she had all the room she needed, the full width of the floor between the two counters, and in doing so almost crashed into a tall mirror on the wall. He clutched at the counter and regained his balance. The foreign lady looked up at him and smiled.

“You are not hurt?”

“No, madame.”

She passed out into the street. Ah! if he only *had* been hurt. He would gladly have

THE NIGHTINGALE

broken a leg, an arm, or a rib if only something might have happened to detain her. Who knows? She might have stayed and helped the chemist bandage him up. He could tell from her smile she had a kind heart.

Well, he turned to order his cough drops. He did not wish the chemist to see he was interested in the lady. It was too bad to have to consider the chemist, for he was anxious to follow the lovely stranger with his eyes at least, since convention prevented his following her with his legs. Should the black-currant lozenges be with or without tannin? He was just about to decide on the latter, yet (as he was about to say it) the thought struck him what a difference in life the presence of a woman — the right woman — makes. There he stood, surrounded, as he had been a moment before, by the counters, the chemist, the glass case protecting the tooth and hairbrushes and other perishable articles, and the mirror! But he had lost interest in cough drops. His only desire now was to leave the chemist's. The shop seemed cold and shabby and uninteresting. Fortunately a large pile of licorice tablets was on the counter. He took up a box, threw down sixpence, and passed out. He did not even stop to put one in his

THE NIGHTINGALE

mouth, which is always the first thing one ought to do in purchasing cough drops.

He was not too late to see the ladies. There was the car. At the wheel sat the American lady. Leaning over in front of the hood was the lovely foreigner trying to crank it. He sprang to her side.

"Let me spin it. I have done it several times at the garage at Porlock."

Suzetta looked up, her curly hair tumbling into her eyes, her cheeks aglow with excitement — for was not this another "nice man" who, like all the others, wanted to help her?

"Many, many thousand thanks," she said warmly as she got into the car and sat down beside Hilda.

"Thank you very much," echoed Hilda.

Peter bowed, stepped back to the pavement, and the car shot away.

So far as Hilda knew, that was all there was about Peter. Miss Stebbins's coachman had cranked her car. He had shown a surprising desire to make himself useful when she had no possible claim on his services. Evidently it was his nature to try to please as he went through life. She decided, as Suzetta had done, that he was a "nice man," and that was the end of him.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Later Hilda remembered that Suzetta had made no comment on Peter. She had not even said, "What a strong man !"

No, not the slightest commendatory adjective fell from her lips.

So that was the end of Peter until a certain day in April when, as she sat looking at a catalogue of bathroom fixtures, for Hilda had decided she must have an American bath, Suzetta came in crying. She was a sunny little person, and Hilda had never before seen her even look sad, much less sob convulsively as she was doing now. She went straight up to her, put her arm around her, kissed her, and sat her down in a chair.

"You have had bad news. Tell me, what is it?"

Her mind flew to Sorrento. She decided at once that one of the little brothers who could pick fruit so fast had fallen out of an orange tree — no, maybe a lemon tree, if they grew higher. She was sure it was a bad fall, Suzetta was crying so hard.

"Oh, Suzetta, which one is it?" she asked.

"It is Pietro," answered Suzetta.

"Pietro," said Hilda. Her mind ran swiftly over the names of all six little brothers, Do-

THE NIGHTINGALE

menico, Christino, Emilio, Hannabale, Matteo, Giralomo.

She could not remember any Pietro. To be sure there might be a new baby named Pietro, but he would not be picking oranges.

Here was a mystery. As she comforted Suzetta she wondered how she could fathom it. Ah, it might be a cousin.

"When did this letter from Sorrento come?" she asked.

"There was no letter, signora. I have not heard from home for three weeks; not since Paris."

"Then how do you know Pietro is ill? Perhaps it is not so bad as you think."

"Pietro is not in Sorrento, and he is not ill," said Suzetta. "He is to lose his place, and we were to be married next month. I have wanted to tell you, signora, that I loved Pietro, but I was afraid you would take him away."

Hilda still looked dazed.

"Peter!" said Suzetta, anglicizing it. "That is what every one here calls him, but I call him Pietro. It is prettier."

"Do you mean to say you are engaged to Miss Stebbins's coachman?"

THE NIGHTINGALE

“Yes,” said Suzetta. “We have been engaged two days.”

Hilda sat down, too. She wished to collect her thoughts.

“Well, Suzetta, you are very enterprising, and very, very clever. I thought you were so open and frank. I thought I could read you like a book. I see you have depths like the rest of us.”

“I am glad if the signora thinks I am in any way like her. I try to be,” answered Suzetta.

Well, here was a new problem. Hilda saw she must at once learn more about Peter and see whether he was a fit husband for Suzetta. Things had gone too far to be stopped unless there was real reason for it. She had been very careless.

“How did you get to know Peter?” she inquired.

“We have met,” said Suzetta, “many times. At first he only admired my sewing. He drove by one day when you were within in your room with a headache, and he came up to me to ask if we had letters he could post for us—he was driving to the village—and to say if we needed help at any time, since we had no man, to let him know. He has much freedom of time.

THE NIGHTINGALE

I showed him my sewing. It was a collar I was embroidering, and he liked it very much. He was not in a hurry," said Suzetta. "He stayed a long time, and before he left, signora, he stopped liking the sewing and liked me."

"Well, Suzetta, this is all very idyllic, and if he is a nice man and loves you, and can support you, he shall marry you. But what am I going to do without you? Promise me you won't leave me till I go back to America. I am going as soon as I hear a nightingale sing. Promise not to desert me."

Suzetta thought very hard. She loved Mrs. Maneley dearly. She loved Peter even more, in a different way. She did so want to be married and sew for Peter.

"Yes, signora," she said, "I will wait. I will not leave you till you hear the nightingale. Maybe," she added, "Peter could find one for us."

"Oh, no," said Hilda, frightened at the very thought of having to give up her lovely farmhouse—just as it was going to have a bath, too. "Oh, no, God will send us one when it is time. Tell me now all about Peter. Why is he leaving Miss Stebbins? And don't cry. I will promise you that everything will be all right."

THE NIGHTINGALE

I am a great manager. I will fix it all right. Just tell me what happened."

"Miss Stebbins wishes a motor-car like yours. She has seen you drive and thinks you do it so well and look so well in your car. She wants a man who can teach her. She is not going to keep horses any more. She has told Pietro. It is a great sorrow to her, but he must go. She must get a man from London."

"Miss Stebbins is very foolish to let a good man like Peter go. She should have him taught how to drive. She should send him to a Y.M.C.A. school. It is much better. These city chauffeurs are very wild and drive too fast. I know what I will do," she cried. "I have a plan. Don't worry at all, Suzetta. In a month's time we will have Peter back at Miss Stebbins's as her chauffeur. When does she get her car?"

"It comes next week." Suzetta's tone was the very depth of woe. "Peter leaves Monday. He will have to find another place—in another part of England, perhaps. I will never see him. He may forget me."

Once more she wept bitterly.

"When will you see Peter again? When you do, tell him I must see him at once. We have no time to waste."

THE NIGHTINGALE

A light was shining in Hilda's eyes.

"I shall see him at four this afternoon. I am going to Mrs. Tubbs' to get eggs and Peter said he would stop there to inquire after her husband's health for Miss Stebbins. She is a very kind lady. Much of Peter's time is spent in doing kind errands for her. That is the way I meet him."

"Well," said Hilda, "if my plan goes through I shall come to know Miss Stebbins, so I am glad she is nice. Tell Peter I must see him this evening if possible — to call here as soon after dinner as he can. Then," she said, "we will see what we can evolve."

CHAPTER XV

THAT evening as Hilda sat at her desk Suzetta knocked shyly and said, —

“Peter is here. Shall I tell him to come in and see you?”

“Yes, and you stay, too, Suzetta. We are all going to play this little game together. I will explain it all very plainly so you will both understand.”

“Oh, Peter,” she said, “I am so glad you could come. First I must congratulate you. I have known a great many charming girls, — American, and French, and German, and Italian, and English, — and I do not love one of them as I love Suzetta.”

As she rolled out these nationalities Peter’s eyes blazed with excitement.

“She is the sweetest person in the world. You are a very fortunate man.”

“Yes,” said Suzetta, looking up adoringly, “I can sew so well.”

“What one can *do* does n’t matter so much,” said Hilda. “It is what a person is. You must both be very good and always love each other.”

THE NIGHTINGALE

Suzetta took Peter's hand and said, "Yes, signora, we will," and Peter said, "Certainly, madame!"

He would always, he knew, keep loving Suzetta more, never less. And he had a very good character. He had only smoked once in his life, and that was at his brother's wedding.

"Well, it all seems too good to be true; only I must tell you, Peter, Suzetta has promised not to leave me just yet. You cannot be married right away. But, anyway, you are going to be very busy for the next month or so. You would have no time to get married. I am going to turn you into a chauffeur. Not a handy-man chauffeur who can do any odd thing that turns up in the house or in the garden or the stable. You are going to be a very high-class product, well trained and drawing a high salary."

Peter and Suzetta looked a shade unbelieving. How was this to be accomplished? Peter said it would be very nice, but he could think of no way.

"Oh, you don't have to. I have done all that," said Hilda. "All you will have to do is to do exactly as I say. I have planned it all. It is very simple."

She proceeded to elaborate her ideas.

THE NIGHTINGALE

"The basic idea of my plot is," she began, "that the minute we see some one else have something which we have n't ourselves, we want it. Sometimes we are willing to take a duplicate. Sometimes we want the thing itself."

"Do you mean take it away from the other person?" said Suzetta in horror. "Surely that would be wicked."

"Yes, that's exactly it. It is often done, and it is not always wicked. Now, Peter, you shall learn how to drive, and then you shall come to me as a chauffeur. Miss Stebbins will see you and want you back. Very reluctantly, I will let you go."

Both Peter and Suzetta beamed as this masterly scheme was unfolded.

"It will mean quite a good deal of work, but it is all very interesting. It will be lots of fun to do. We will begin to-morrow. First we must meet with an accident, Suzetta and I, on a road somewhere a couple of miles out of the village."

"We will not get hurt?" said Suzetta.

Even Peter looked alarmed, and a little bit as though he would not be as docile about this "plan" as Hilda had expected.

"No," said Hilda, "we will not even sprain an ankle. We will just make-believe. Peter will

THE NIGHTINGALE

be hidden behind a hedge. When he tells people about it, he can say he was walking across the fields — that's what English people are always doing; then when he sees the accident he will come to our rescue."

"What will the accident be?"

"The top of the hood will fall off, the radiator will suddenly spring to life, or something unusual will happen! We can all say afterwards that in the excitement we did not know exactly what did happen. Anyway, we will be thrown out."

"Really!" said Suzetta.

Again Peter looked nervous, as though he did not relish the dangers through which Suzetta was to pass.

"Not hurt," Hilda reassured them. "We will just get out ourselves, very fast. We will choose a lonely spot, and we will run ahead a mile or so and then turn back and have the accident. Then we will be sure that nobody will be around to see it and get ahead of Peter in the rescue."

"Perhaps Peter might not be there at the right time," said Suzetta. "It would be too bad to have it all happen and then not have Peter jump out from the hedge. He told me his watch was not keeping good time this past week."

THE NIGHTINGALE

“Was this some evening when you said it was time for him to go home? If so, do not worry. No watch is ever right under those conditions. But if it is really out of repair I will loan him mine for the day. We can look at the clock in the car.”

Every difficulty seemed to disappear. For every objection Hilda had a remedy.

“Well, whatever the accident is, — we will decide that later, — Peter will help me to straighten things out and get the car going again.”

“Will it be hard?” asked Peter. “I cannot use tools.”

“Oh, no, we will just put in a little oil, just work around the hood. That is what people always do when there is an accident. They stand around the hood and lean over and talk.”

“That is very easy,” said Peter; “I can do that.”

“And I will help,” said Suzetta.

“I am sorry, though, you know so little about tools.” Hilda looked worried. “You will have to learn if you are to be a chauffeur. Maybe you were frightened by tools, as a child — was that it?” sympathetically.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Peter began to look a little as the clerk had in Giddy & Giddy's office.

"The signora likes to joke," explained Suzetta. "You must learn that you can understand only about half of what she says. When it is important she says it more plainly."

Peter was encouraged. He proceeded to tell Hilda his experiences with tools.

"Seven years ago next Christmas is the last time I touched tools," he said. "I found then they were not in my line. On that day I helped Mr. Hicks, the veterinary, pull a horse's tooth. I saw then my hands were too clumsy for tools."

"Oh, I'm sure anybody would feel a little awkward working with teeth. It is a very highly specialized and very difficult profession. Dentists to kings and queens often get titles. The kings are so glad not to be hurt, and so relieved when they find they have lived through the appointment, that they are willing to do anything. They cannot give the dentist a diamond bracelet, as he is not a lady, so sometimes he gets a title."

Peter began to see that handling tools was an honorable profession : so honorable that his sense of honesty forbade his letting Hilda think he himself had used the tools.

THE NIGHTINGALE

"I only helped," he said. "I only held the horse's head and gave him chloroform. Perhaps I should n't say I used the tools. I only handed them to the doctor."

"Well, that is extremely important!" responded Hilda. "In America the nurse who hands the instruments to a surgeon gets six pounds a week. You underestimate your capabilities, Peter. You must learn to place a higher value on your services. How much do you get a week now?"

"One pound," said Peter. "I had a raise from fifteen shillings a week last Christmas."

"Well, as a chauffeur you will get four or five times that amount."

Peter for the first time looked incredulous. This was more wonderful than the accident, or the story about the dentist.

"I would be rich," he said.

"Yes," said Hilda, "all chauffeurs are. And the more you are paid the less you will do; that, of course, goes without saying. If you are a sort of half-chauffeur you have to wash the car and polish the brass, and do all the rough dirty work. At five pounds a week I do not think you should do anything more arduous than look at the speedometer and keep the run of the

THE NIGHTINGALE

gasoline, aside from the driving, which you cannot, of course, escape and be a chauffeur."

Peter felt quite light-headed as he pondered these dizzy heights of inaction.

"I would have a great deal of time to see Suzetta," he said. "It would be very nice. How can you manage it?"

"Oh, it is perfectly simple," said Hilda. "Be behind the hedge in the field just beyond the woods on the Withypool road to-morrow. We will have the accident at 2.30 promptly. Here is my watch. I will blow my horn three times just before we jump for our lives. Just come out and pick us up, and I will tell you the rest of the plan as we drive home."

Peter and Suzetta went off to the kitchen, and Suzetta sewed, and they both talked of their happy future.

"She is a wonderful woman," said Peter. "Do you think it will all be as she says?"

"Everything always is. She has a way with her. Now you must go home. It is eleven by the signora's watch."

CHAPTER XVI

AT 2.30 the next day Hilda and Suzetta were rescued on the Withypool road by Peter. After gazing earnestly for ten minutes or so at the engine and brushing the dirt off their dresses and hats, they all reëntered the car, Peter sitting in front, next to Hilda.

"Now I will give you your first lesson driving a car. This is about the easiest car to run, so it is a very good one for you to begin with. As soon as you leave Miss Stebbins, you are to come to me. I will teach you very fast, and in a couple of days you will drive this car beautifully. Then I shall send you to Bristol and have you learn all about the engine and tires. They are the hardest. What kind of a car is Miss Stebbins to have? You must learn every crook and cranny of its entire physique."

"She is going to have a Phord, too."

"Oh, that makes it the easiest thing in the world. If I only knew more you would n't even have to go away. But all I know is about the oiling, and the gasoline, and the water."

"I will enjoy going away," said Peter. "I can

THE NIGHTINGALE

buy a nice present for Suzetta, and I have always longed to travel. How long shall I be away?"

"Oh, perhaps a month, not more," said Hilda. "If you work hard you will know everything in that time and ought to be able to take a prize at a fair for quick change of tires. I wish you to be a very high-class chauffeur. You must work hard. To-night I will write Miss Stebbins and ask her about your habits and character, — not that I wish to know — it is simply part of my plan, — and tell her that I have engaged you, on condition her reply is satisfactory, from the date you leave her. Monday, come to me and you shall have your first lesson. By Wednesday you will drive so well that you can go for me to the nursery at Oare to get some plants I ordered. Suzetta can go with you for company."

That night Hilda sent the following note to Miss Stebbins: —

"MY DEAR MISS STEBBINS, — I am writing to ask you in regard to the character and habits of Peter Harub, who tells me he has been in your employ for five years. I do not ask about his ability, for with me he is to act as chauffeur. I met with a slight accident recently near Withypool, and he, happening by at that moment, very

THE NIGHTINGALE

kindly helped me to make sufficient repairs to reach home under our own power. I do so hate to be towed in. But I am very fortunate. It only happened once in my whole life.

“My experience has been that it is much better to train a reliable man, whom one knows about, than to take a stranger, no matter how good his references. I found him so intelligent and apt with tools that I decided yesterday when I heard he was leaving your service to engage him. I have already seen him and secured his promise to come to me on the 8th. After showing him what I can myself about driving a car, I shall send him to Bristol for a few weeks’ special training on cars, feeling confident that when he returns I will have not only a most competent driver and mechanician, but a man in whose personal worth I have confidence. One does n’t find a man every day who can be depended on to drive at the rate he is ordered to, and who never drinks. Chauffeurs from cities are so apt to have bad habits.

“Hoping to hear that you have found him personally reliable, I am

Yours very truly,”

Hilda signed her name with an airy flourish.

THE NIGHTINGALE

This letter was delivered, and Hilda received next day a polite note from Miss Stebbins in which she gave Peter's traits and qualifications in detail, and spoke with real feeling of his qualities of heart and mind.

At the end she said, very frankly, "I am rather sorry now that it did not occur to me to keep Peter in my employ and have him taught as you are planning to do. However, my new chauffeur comes with excellent references, and I shall hope that he will be satisfactory."

Three weeks passed. One day a note came from Peter saying he had worked not only by day, but also by night, as much as he could, and he felt competent now to come back and do any work necessary about the car. It seemed wrong to stay away any longer than was necessary, and if agreeable to Mrs. Maneley he would return to Stoke Pero the following Friday and report to her for orders.

"Now," said Hilda, on the following Saturday, "I shall simply flaunt you in Miss Stebbins's eyes. You know her habits. Just drive the car anywhere you think you are likely to meet her. There is nothing like seeing somebody else enjoying something you used to enjoy yourself, to make you wish you had it

THE NIGHTINGALE

back again. Where does she usually go Saturdays?"

"In the morning she visits the orphans and the old ladies. In the afternoon she usually goes to Minehead for the drive and a little shopping."

"We will do all three," said Hilda. "We will take warm wraps, as we may not be home till late, and for the next week or so we will try to dog poor Miss Stebbins's footsteps, or rather her motor-tracks, for I am only interested in her meanderings in her car."

Hilda's plan worked splendidly. Miss Stebbins was far from satisfied with the new chauffeur. He was inclined to drive too fast; was not careful enough at corners; was not patient when teaching her (he once or twice almost insinuated she was stupid); he gave her one or two dreadful bounces; he knew none of her little ways as did Peter; and when he learned them, made no effort to remember them; she had to keep telling him over and over where the same people lived. In fact much of her pleasure in her car was spoiled because she missed Peter so dreadfully. She had heard somewhere that Hilda was making only a brief stay in Stoke Pero. She saw no reason why, when Peter left

THE NIGHTINGALE

Mrs. Maneley's, he should go as chauffeur to some other more fortunate being in England and not return to her. She decided, therefore, to lay wires to recapture him as soon as he was free. She conferred with her housekeeper, who perhaps knew Suzetta, Mrs. Maneley's maid. Judging from English novels, the housekeeper is always a woman of parts, and can always be relied upon in an emergency for advice and practical help. In solemn conclave they decided to let Peter know in some way that the fatted calf was ready any time he felt free to return to the Grange, and that as chauffeur he would receive exactly what Miss Stebbins was giving the present incumbent, — five pounds per week.

Acting on Mrs. Mannix's advice, Miss Stebbins wrote two notes, one to Peter, saying she would hope to see him if at any time he left Mrs. Maneley's service, before he looked about for another place, the other to Hilda, asking her as a very great favor, and hoping she would pardon the seeming impertinence of the request, if she would let her know as soon as she decided definitely to part with Peter. She had heard in the village that Hilda was leaving for America, probably in May. If she could hope to regain Peter in a few weeks' time she would

THE NIGHTINGALE

keep her present chauffeur for that brief space, even though he was not satisfactory. If it would be longer, she would make a change at once, and try some one else.

Without going into wearisome details, Hilda, as a great favor, let Peter go back to Miss Stebbins. Her return to America was uncertain, she herself liked to drive so much, etc., etc., etc., it seemed hardly necessary to keep a man. She could recommend him most highly, and from a large and varied experience with chauffeurs she felt that Peter was an exception; he ought to be treated with the greatest consideration, for he was a treasure — his price was above rubies.

So it happened that Miss Stebbins, when re-engaging Peter, said, "I have decided that you shall have a boy under you to do the heavy rough work connected with the car. You are too valuable to me in other ways for me to wish you to be tied down to mere routine work, unless, of course, we are touring." At this alluring word Peter fairly trembled with anticipatory joy. "I wish you to be free to do errands for me, to consult with me about things connected with the car, and to teach me to drive."

These things Peter said he would be glad to do, and anything else Miss Stebbins could think

THE NIGHTINGALE

of which would add to her comfort or convenience.

The interview ended with very evident happiness reflected on the faces of both Peter and Miss Stebbins. To Peter, it all seemed like a fairy story. As Hilda had prophesied, all he would have to do would be to watch the speedometer, and sometimes cast a haughty glance at the carburetor. He would have plenty of spare time to spend with Suzetta.

In the various letters and interviews which led to the transfer of Peter from the Cottage to the Grange, Miss Stebbins and Hilda had become acquainted and quite friendly, for Hilda was able to give her many small points about running her car. One or two small tricks she had picked up from Horace were specially useful to a novice, as they lessened the danger of stalling the engine (that terror of all beginners) when executing maneuvers like backing and edging into a tight corner.

One day Miss Stebbins, evidently emboldened by Hilda's kind interest in her car, said, "I like so much your idea of naming your car. I should like to think of a name for mine, but none I have thought of seems very satisfactory. 'Bucephalus' has so much character. Would you

THE NIGHTINGALE

be willing to help me with a suggestion or two?"

Hilda was delighted. She thought rapidly.

"How would you like 'Grane,' Brunhilde's charger? It would be just the thing. You could put two wings in your hat and it would be just like Brunhilde's helmet."

"No," said Miss Stebbins, "I can't do that. I am sorry, it would be so original, but I can't because I belong to the Audubon Society, and so can't wear feathers."

"Well," said Hilda, determined not to give up the fight for "Grane" without a struggle, "they let you wear cock's feathers. You could have those. They would wave in the wind, and besides looking like Brunhilde, you would look a little like the Bersaglieri of Rome."

Miss Stebbins wavered in her mind. Perhaps she would look too dashing. Though peculiar in some ways, she was a person of quiet tastes.

It might not be becoming, and though as a rule she thought little about her appearance, she did want to look well in that car. She had already in the privacy of her room, with the door locked against the maid, tried on three different styles of motor-veils. None of them,

THE NIGHTINGALE

alas, looked so well as Hilda's. She decided some day to ask her how she put hers on. It always looked fascinating and provocative, even though it looked disheveled!

"Another reason," said Hilda, quite enamored of the idea now she had embarked upon it, "that the cock's plumes would be better is that they would not be so stiff, and therefore more becoming. The lines" (this is the last argument used about any hat) "would be softer about the face."

As she said these magic words, beloved of milliners all over the world, Hilda felt exactly like Georgette on the rue de la Paix.

But Miss Stebbins was adamant. She thought it sounded a little too adventurous. Could Hilda think of something a little simpler?

"Well, Rosinante," said Hilda; "that's the name of our car at home. It would n't, of course, mean that you were a bit like Don Quixote."

She feared Miss Stebbins had shied away from Grane because she disliked being thought like the warlike Brunhilde. "Maybe she is nervous about fire, too," thought Hilda.

"But who would be Sancho Panza?" interposed the literal Miss Stebbins. "Peter does n't

THE NIGHTINGALE

resemble him, and there are no windmills in England. No, I do not think it is very appropriate."

"I know," said Hilda; "I am on the right track at last. You are so fond of flowers. I have never seen such lovely stock as you have in your garden. Why not call your car 'The Marigold'? That is a nice English name, and I think myself it is more appropriate than those others I suggested."

Miss Stebbins took to the name at once — and that very afternoon Hilda and Suzetta went over to the Grange and the car was driven up a path till it stood right in the midst of the flower-beds, and there it was christened. Out of compliment to Peter, who was to drive it, Miss Stebbins asked Suzetta to name it, and she broke over the radiator a bottle filled with water from the Dead Sea. Miss Stebbins's much-traveled cousin, to whose lectures Peter had listened entranced all the previous winter, had brought it to her on his return from the Holy Land. Peter felt his horizon was widening. Who could tell? Perhaps some day Miss Stebbins would take her car to the Continent and he would see foreign lands. If only Mrs. Maneley would suggest it! She seemed like a good fairy, who had

THE NIGHTINGALE

only to wave a wand and things happened. She had brought him Suzetta; she had brought Miss Stebbins The Marigold. Perhaps some day she would get them all across the Channel!

CHAPTER XVII

MANIPULATING the love affairs of Suzetta and Peter and the domestic machinery of Miss Stebbins were not Hilda's only occupations. She was to launch another love affair, and plunge even deeper into the interior workings of the Stebbins household.

It all began with a bathroom. Hilda decided to have a bath put in her cottage. She had taken the house at a very low rental, so she felt she could put a little into permanent improvements; and the owner helped along by promising to pay half. Hilda assured him he could get it all back in rent in a year or two. She would tell all the Americans she knew what a lovely place it was, and if he advertised it in the "Lookout" he would have dozens of applications.

The personage selected to do the job was an Alfred Cummings, who lived in Porlock, a village three miles away. He was the plumber for all that section of the countryside. So little plumbing was done they needed only one. He was of a very mild, gentle nature, and seemed to be universally beloved — a state of affairs not

THE NIGHTINGALE

at all general in the plumbing fraternity. He was always accompanied by a small boy aged about twelve, whose principal duty seemed to be to hold a candle, and then, having held it, to get out of the light. The work was done by contract, so when Mr. Cummings arrived and departed was not a matter of particular moment to Hilda, except that the longer he worked each day the sooner, she judged, the bathroom would be in operation.

The work went slowly. For weeks it seemed to Hilda there had been a clutter of pipes and fixtures and dirty bags of tools and small ends of candles, all the paraphernalia that accompanies the smallest plumbing operation. One day late in March, Hilda noticed there had been less thumping and banging than usual during the morning, less dashing to and fro on the part of Tommy carrying through the house mysterious "elbows" and other disjointed pieces of pipe. But she never dreamed that poor Mr. Cummings was not well and was only continuing his work under great mental stress because he felt she would be disappointed if it weren't done for Sunday. (Though why one needs a bathroom more on Sunday than on a weekday was unexplained.) Still, Mr. Cummings had set

THE NIGHTINGALE

that day in his mind, and though he had had a hard blow the night before, — it came in the post, — he struggled manfully on, trying to make the faucets turn with just the precise degree of ease that Hilda desired.

“It is always better to have them a little stiff at first,” Hilda was told when she scrutinized them critically and found them almost impossible to manage. “In six months’ time,” she was assured, “they would work easily.”

“But I won’t be here in six months,” said Hilda. “I expect to be in America — unless it takes me six months to open the faucet; then, of course, I would be here twelve, — six more to turn it off.”

As a result of this cold, logical calculation, Mr. Cummings redoubled his efforts, and finally loosened them so that they would, as he said, “work.” Hilda, after paralyzing the muscles of each hand respectively, would clap poor Suzetta’s over the refractory faucet. The same paralyzing process would be repeated, and a narrow stream of water would finally emerge. Their ten fingers — so rosy that Hilda despaired of their ever returning to their natural color — would then be aching and useless for an indefinite period. Even with this elaborate expendi-

THE NIGHTINGALE

ture of muscle and energy, the record was three minutes. This Mr. Cummings was trying to lower.

Hilda had made several agitated trips during the morning to see how the work was progressing and to "try and see if that was a little better, ma'am," and she was seriously disturbed when Suzetta came in and told her that Mr. Cummings was going home, — he felt ill, but would be back the next day if possible.

"Oh, I do wish he could work a little longer. He's been two days on those faucets now — they're almost right. Tell him I'm sure if he keeps right on for five minutes they will be finished. No, I'll go tell him myself."

She met Mr. Cummings in the hall. Behind stood Tommy, blowing out the candle. He seemed always to be either lighting it or blowing it out.

"Oh, Mr. Cummings, I am heartbroken. It is too bad you are ill. I am so sorry, and it is so unfortunate for the faucets. Do tell me, is it your head?"

Mr. Cummings looked pale, far paler than workmen usually look; and Hilda noticed his eyes were haggard, as though he hadn't slept.

THE NIGHTINGALE

"No, ma'am, you're very kind. I'm sure it is n't my 'ead; it's my 'eart."

"Oh, I'm so sorry; come in here." Hilda hustled him into the little living-room and sat him down in the sun. She thought hurriedly of spirits of ammonia. There were none in the house.

"I'm so sorry. I have such a splendid heart myself I don't believe I have anything to give you. Would n't you better lie down?"

She brought him some water.

Mr. Cummings seemed embarrassed by these attentions, but evidently hardly knew how to stop them. He seemed completely disheartened.

Tommy had proceeded to the kitchen to place the candle on the table; Suzetta stood frightened in the doorway. Mr. Cummings sat with his head bowed over his chest, his hands folded in his lap. He was a man of about thirty, but he looked much older as he sat there. Finally he looked up at Hilda and tried to rise.

"It's not my real 'eart that's bad, Mrs. Maneley. It's the 'eart you love people with. I've had a great blow," he added, "I should n't have troubled you with it."

He was quiet for a moment or two.

THE NIGHTINGALE

“I’m sorry to have made you all this trouble. It’s nothing — nothing that matters. I had a bad night, and I could n’t take any breakfast. It’s a faint spell, I think. I’ve had things to worry me.”

He took another sip of water.

“Now I’m all right,” he said. “Thomas will walk home with me. I did n’t know it would be so hard getting used to it. I can fix those faucets up to-morrow, Mrs. Maneley. My mind has n’t exactly been on my work lately. I’ve been busy thinking about my own affairs. I don’t feel I’ve done right by you. I did n’t seem to have any heart for my work.” The *h*’s were getting better; he was less agitated.

Hilda was deeply distressed. The man’s unhappiness was so real, she had often been so unhappy herself, and knew so well there was always a way out of it. She could not ask for his confidence, but she did wish he would trust her enough to tell her.

“No, you’re not going yet,” she said. “Suzetta is going to bring you some tea, and the faucets are just about right, so don’t worry. It will be good exercise for my hands just as they are. It will make them strong for golf. Don’t worry about your work. It’s been so good of

THE NIGHTINGALE

you to come when you did n't feel well. I wish there was something I could do."

She felt a little awkward, but she looked kind and very sympathetic, and that was just what poor Mr. Cummings needed. He looked up hesitatingly.

"Do you know much about music?" he asked. "If you do, maybe you *could* help me. I'm very anxious to learn all about music. I've never had any time, and no one to show me. But now," he added, "I see I should have taken lessons. Then I would n't have all this unhappiness."

Hilda looked puzzled. What he was driving at she had no idea.

"No, I'm afraid I don't know much about music," she said. "At least I can't play or sing, or do anything except just enjoy it. But I've had good teachers. I'm sure I could be of some help if you would let me."

Mr. Cummings, encouraged by this, pulled from his pocket a letter. It was written in a neat, girlish hand, and was very short. Inclosed was a single printed sheet. He took this out and handed it to Hilda.

"I would like to understand that man, all about him and his music," he said, pointing to a name on the sheet.

THE NIGHTINGALE

It was a programme of a recital at a musical institute to be given early in April in Bristol. The name he pointed to so mysteriously, evidently because he could n't pronounce it, was Brahms. Three young ladies, Miss Hazel Wood, Miss Lottie Stone, and Miss Dora Tree, were going to play a Brahms trio. Mr. Cummings felt rather frightened to have gone so far, but there was nothing to do now but to explain further.

"The reason I want to know about Brahms is because Dora plays his pieces. She says she won't marry me because I'm not a musical temperament; she says I'm not a bit musical. Dora and I were almost engaged, and she's been away now six months in Bristol taking lessons. She wants to teach. I can't play even the mouth organ. She says if I could even understand Mendelssohn, it would be different; but we would never be happy. So I got this letter last night saying we would always be friends, and she was to play at this concert and she would hope to see me there so I could see how she had improved, and she would always think of me with kindness. She's very pretty, and she has such pretty hands. I don't know anything prettier than Dora's hands when she

THE NIGHTINGALE

plays soft, slow things. She can play very fast and very loud, too," he added, as though Hilda might not be sufficiently impressed with what he had said of Dora's powers.

"Oh, I'm sure she can if she can play Brahms," responded Hilda, "but I'm glad she likes Brahms; it makes it so much easier for you. I'll tell you what I will do. I've been wanting a piano. It's very stupid here evenings; I'll send to London for one and give you lessons. You shall come every night. Let me see," — she looked at the programme, — "we have three weeks to coach you in. Well," — Hilda was thinking rapidly, — "you just write her and say of course she knows best. You will enjoy coming to the concert. Be sure to tell her you will always love her, and that you will not be discouraged, but will try hard to make her love you, too. Just say that, — here, why not write it now?"

She started to walk over to the writing-desk to get the paper. She turned around just before she reached it, and said impressively, "I promise you, Mr. Cummings, that you shall be engaged to Dora the day of the concert. What's more, she will love you so much that she won't care whether you are musical or not."

THE NIGHTINGALE

“Are you a magician?” asked Mr. Cummings.

Hilda laughed.

“No, but I know a lot about human hearts. I know how to make people fall in love. Just trust me. I’ll send for the piano this minute. I’ll write my letter first while you drink your tea.”

Suzetta had just come in and set down near the despondent Mr. Cummings a reviving-looking tray.

Bechstein, Broadwood, — what were the names of English pianos? They all seemed to begin with B. The better the firm, as a rule, the less willing they were to rent good pianos. Hilda wrote to another firm whose name she had seen in the papers. With just enough circumlocution to make her appeal cajoling, she asked for the best piano they had in stock.

“First, Mr. Cummings, you will have to understand infinity,” said Hilda, as she sat sipping her tea. “I will explain it to you while you finish your muffin. You must eat more,” she said, sternly. — “Yes, send Tommy home. Mr. Cummings has got to rest and will have his supper here, and then we’ll take him home in the car.” This to Suzetta, who brought in an

THE NIGHTINGALE

inquiry from the perplexed Tommy as to what he should do next. "Tell Tommy to tell his mother he felt ill — he has been working too hard, and I am giving him some medicine to quiet his nerves. Tell her not to worry, he will be much better to-morrow."

"The reason you have got to understand infinity," resumed Hilda, turning to Mr. Cummings, "is that if you understand that, you will be encouraged. You will see that, no matter how much Dora knows, she knows so little that she ought not to get cross at you for knowing less. Brahms is a particularly good person to explain it. No, it is not hard. Don't be discouraged. A person who can understand plumbing can understand anything. First I'll make a diagram, that's the easiest way. Then you will see exactly what the word 'infinite' means."

Hilda's mind flew back to her early teens when she struggled with geometry. Parallel lines, points, — that's what she needed.

"Of course, you've heard the word 'infinite,'" she began.

"Yes, it's His mercy," replied Mr. Cummings with commendable speed.

"I see you go to church. I'm very glad. I hope Dora does, too."

THE NIGHTINGALE

"Yes, Dora plays the organ. She gets ten pounds a year and free lessons, one a week, from Mr. Patten, who plays the organ at Minehead."

"Well, I see you are going to be a very musical family—but we must finish up 'infinity.' There are so many other interesting things in the world to talk about, but we must stick to 'infinity' for the present."

She drew two parallel lines, very, very long ones, and on each of them Hilda put a dot. One dot was considerably in advance of the other.

She edged up to Mr. Cummings. She spread out the paper.

"Now here is infinity in a nutshell. These two lines go on forever and ever. They never get any nearer together; they never get any farther apart. They go on to London, they go on to Russia, they go on to Siberia." Hilda got a little uncertain here, the earth being round. "There they go off into space at an angle, and go on to the moon, and the sun, and the stars, and the Milky Way. They never, never stop, and they're always just the same. No matter how far they go, they'll never meet. So just for a name, we'll say they meet at infinity

THE NIGHTINGALE

—that's farther away than anything in the whole world. That's the reason, when we can't measure anything, — in distance, or weight, or size, — we say it's infinite. You understand that, don't you?"

"Yes," said Mr. Cummings. "It's the way I love Dora."

"It's the way Dora is going to love you," responded Hilda. "That miserable Dora," she said under her breath.

But though Mr. Cummings evidently wanted to talk about Dora, she nailed him right down to infinity, determined not to leave the subject till she had explored its innermost recesses.

"Now, when those two lines go on for millions and millions of miles, it's nothing to them where those dots happen to be. The dot farther along, which is Dora, may be about the seventieth mile." In her soul Hilda thought Dora was n't quite so far. "You are the other dot — on this line." Hilda jabbed it with her pencil. "You are just starting out. But don't you see when you consider what distances there are for you both to go, Dora and you are practically at the same stage of your journey. Neither of you, of course, will get very far in this world," she added sadly, "life is so short. That's the

THE NIGHTINGALE

reason we all ought to make a good start in the things we want to be. The start is everything. After that it depends on ourselves what we are in our souls. We can make ourselves go wherever we want to."

Here Hilda paused. She went off in a little day-dream of her own.

She had tried so hard to be good, and like other people she was always failing. Nobody had ever been so discouraged as she, or struggled so hard to progress toward perfection, — that indefinite goal which is set before each one of us in earliest infancy, and dangled, more or less alluringly, before our eyes all through life.

Hilda came back to infinity. Mr. Cummings had evidently not noticed the lapse. He, too, had been engaged in his own thoughts.

"Now do you feel encouraged?" she said.

"I do," said Mr. Cummings, firmly.

"Then," said Hilda, "we will proceed to Brahms. Brahms is a specially good composer for Dora to be fond of because he, too, is like infinity. No matter how much you study him, or how well you play what he has written, there's always more to him. So no matter how much Dora knows about him, don't be discouraged. She is n't very far ahead of you.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Some of his things are very easy, anyway. You shall play Brahms, too. And he wrote songs. I will teach you a lullaby. Dora should n't act as though Brahms were beyond you. It is very easy to pick out any composer's ideas and enjoy them."

Hilda here explained themes briefly.

"If you can only play with one hand, you get lots of fun out of music. That's about all I can do. I'll send for the music Dora's going to play and we will study it, and then when you go to the concert you will enjoy it so much more, and recognize all the parts you know."

At this juncture Mr. Cummings gazed down at his dirty hands.

"I don't think I could ever sit at a piano and play," he said; "look at my hands. They're not like Dora's."

"No, they're much better," said Hilda. "Yes, they are specially good for playing," she went on, examining them critically. "They have a good stretch, they have a good arch; I'm sure you will have a good touch. I know a man with hands just like yours — broad, businesslike-looking hands, who plays Debussy divinely." Here Debussy and modern Frenchmen came in for comment.

THE NIGHTINGALE

"Please," said Mr. Cummings, greatly interested, "don't go so fast. I want to write down their names so I can learn them."

Hilda was enchanted ; he would make a fine pupil. He had the right kind of inquiring and acquiring mind.

"Every day," pursued Hilda, "I will tell you about somebody who wrote music and about the people who are playing and singing to-day, and in three weeks you will have at least a bowing acquaintance with an entirely new world. I want Dora to be greatly impressed when she sees you at the concert," she added. "We will have the piano surely in four days. Then you must come early every morning. You can practice a while and come again in the evening. I'll give you your first lesson now. Put your hands on the table." She showed him how to make o's with his thumb and forefinger and then hold his hands up to his eyes like an opera glass. "Now, lay them down on the table. There's your position."

Mr. Cummings got the idea instantly.

"You're wonderful," said Hilda enthusiastically. "You understand things so quickly."

Mr. Cummings's cheeks were flushed. It was like a fascinating game. Why had Dora never

THE NIGHTINGALE

told him it was like this — why had he wasted so many years?

“Now, as soon as we get the piano we’ll begin on touch and tone; those are the two things you must work for, and you must listen all the time to the sounds you hear as you walk around. Some of them are just noise — some of them are music. You’ve noticed that difference, haven’t you?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Cummings, “I always love to hear the bells — and the waves on the shore. I used to say to Dora when we walked there Sunday evenings, ‘That’s the only music I understand,’ but she used to say, ‘That is n’t music. It’s men like’ — well, I can’t say his name — the German who wrote operas, — swans and knights, — I bought Dora a book about it.”

“Wagner,” said Hilda.

“And that man who wrote waltzes.”

“Strauss,” said Hilda.

“That’s what music is, Dora used to say.”

“Dora is a conceited and narrow-minded egoist,” announced Hilda, boldly. “She has n’t the first idea about music, even if she does play Brahms. Music is a great deal more than just the people who wrote it.”

THE NIGHTINGALE

“Egoist” was, perhaps fortunately, not in Mr. Cummings’s vocabulary, so he let the remark pass.

Hilda was always enthusiastic about any project she took up. She was determined that Mr. Cummings should marry Dora, since he loved her. She decided such love could only be inspired by real worth, whatever the surface superficialities of the young lady might be. She had in her mind a little subsidiary scheme which she would work out later, by which she hoped to make Dora a shade jealous, and thus arouse her to renewed interest in her unassuming but sterling lover.

Since she was giving his life a thorough overhauling, Hilda decided now to turn her attention to his business affairs.

“I think,” she said, with slow emphasis, “you have a great future before you, Mr. Cummings. You are here in this place at just the critical moment. The whole English nation is getting aroused to the importance of bathrooms. There are lots of wealthy people about here. If some one only gave them a start, — if they once got the idea in their heads, — they would all want to be putting them in. All these big houses about here” — she cocked up her eye in a cogi-

THE NIGHTINGALE

tating way — “ought to have half a dozen bathrooms apiece.”

At the thought of the work entailed in putting in all this plumbing, Mr. Cummings nearly fainted away. “It would take years,” he said.

“Of course, if one man did it, or even if Tommy helped. What must happen is that one man must superintend it and get all the glory and all the profits, and have a lot of men under him. You must gradually turn into a sanitary engineer. That will be a much better position for Dora to marry into,” she added.

She felt this, rather than personal ambition, would spur Mr. Cummings on to action.

“You need a shop, or rather an office. We will look around and see if we can find one for you. It must have a plate-glass window. In it we will put a bathtub, and scatter around its base a few faucets and elbows. It will be a good advertisement. Then we must get some one to make a beginning. I know the very person, Miss Stebbins. She has a tremendous house — she could put in dozens.” In her soul Hilda thought she would be accomplishing miracles if she could persuade her to order two.

“Well, it is all very interesting,” she said. “I shall have to think out the details. But I see

THE NIGHTINGALE

it all in my head. You will launch out into a broader field of usefulness and become a professional man and captain of industry. Music will be your recreation in your spare moments. The whole countryside will bristle with bathrooms. Dora will marry you and play Brahms to you at twilight. Don't you think it is lovely? Don't you see it all in your mind?"

It was hard for Mr. Cummings to follow this rhapsody but he said, "Yes, he saw," and "Thank you so much, Mrs. Maneley. You are really wonderful."

"Not at all," said Hilda. "We have n't done it yet, but we will. Now you must rest and forget all about your feeling ill. Would you like to read? Here's a book on Beethoven. Put down on a paper all the things you don't understand, and I will explain them. After supper I will take you home."

Now that the excitement was over, she noticed again the haggard lines in Mr. Cummings's face.

"Oh, I'm so sorry I've talked so much. Maybe it's made you feel worse?"

"No," said Mr. Cummings, with great conviction, "I feel decidedly better."

"Well, don't work too hard at your book.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Just keep thinking all the time that in three weeks you will be engaged to Dora. Don't just think it. You must *believe* it. It is really going to happen."

And Hilda dashed out for a "children's hour" with the lambs, and as she romped about under the trees she could hear Mr. Cummings whistling happily inside.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE piano came in due time, also many, many books, for Hilda could not teach Mr. Cummings the things she had started out to without a lot of cramming up. She grew so interested in the work herself that it did her far more good than it ever did Mr. Cummings, and planning things out, to get the results she wanted to in three short weeks, was tremendously interesting. Each day Mr. Cummings worked at the piano for a little while. He learned to make a fairly good tone, and, even more important, to know a good tone when he heard it.

He achieved a creditable *legato*, at least, his notes were not detached and fenced about, he understood intervals and scales from A to Z, and was making good progress with chords. He was a perfect wizard at the dominant seventh. He knew every one of its contortions and convolutions. He had naturally a good ear, and as the work developed, Hilda saw he had an analytical and mathematical bent to his mind that made all the theoretical part especially easy

THE NIGHTINGALE

and interesting. Sundays they crammed full of music. A few minutes at the piano, and Hilda would dart over for a book, then back for a little more instruction. The whole thing was very haphazard, but in some way Mr. Cummings was making excellent progress. Hilda had heard good music all her life, and had had sufficient instruction to know how to get the results she wanted. She was also very clever at planning the work. Though he did not know it, Mr. Cummings was imbibing music at every pore.

The faucets and general tuning-up of the bathroom took a couple more days, and Hilda advised a couple of days' holiday afterwards for the sake of his health and his music.

“Just do any odd jobs you have for the next few days and come over here between-times and work, drum out folk-songs with one hand — and throw in a bass —” She taught him a few fundamental octaves. He knew his keys so well that when he got the idea it was mere child's play to him.

“You work at your music and I'll try and see Miss Stebbins and get you a commission from her.”

She hardly knew how to accomplish this strategy, but felt sure it could be managed somehow.

THE NIGHTINGALE

That afternoon, as she was out in the car with Suzetta, she met Miss Stebbins and Peter. Miss Stebbins signaled Peter to stop, to which, of course, he was not averse, — though as a rule chauffeurs hate to jam on a brake just for a whim. However, this gave Peter a chance to gaze at Suzetta, whom he had not seen since ten that morning when by careful planning he had met her for a second at the post-office.

“I hear you have a bathroom. May I come and see it,” said Miss Stebbins.

“Was there ever such luck!” thought Hilda.

“I have been thinking for some years,” continued Miss Stebbins, “of putting in a bath; but it is such a nuisance getting the workmen from town, and very expensive, too, I believe. I hear you had Mr. Cummings. How did you like him?”

“He is a wonder,” said Hilda; “so neat and quiet about his work, so obliging, he takes the greatest pains to have everything just the way you want it. I cannot recommend him too highly.”

“But does n’t it take a long time to do the work all alone?”

“He has an assistant whom he is training,” answered Hilda. (Could it be that Tommy and

THE NIGHTINGALE

the candle were spoken of so grandly?) "They always work together. I found them very satisfactory. Do come in and see, then I can tell you all about it. Come to-morrow morning, can't you?"

They parted with smiles, Suzetta and Peter with lingering glances that said, "Eight to-night," just as plainly as though they had formed the words with their lips and tongues.

The next morning Miss Stebbins called.

"How did you ever get your faucets to turn so easily? That's one reason I have n't had a bath before. The new ones always turn so hard you can't use them. I have several friends who have baths, but it takes so much time to draw the water, their bathtubs stand idle most of the time."

"Well, most bathtubs do," said Hilda. "Still, they ought to be used some to keep them in practice."

"How did you manage about the faucets?" questioned Miss Stebbins.

"Well, I just made him do it my way. Men don't realize how much stronger their hands are than women's. I just kept saying, 'It is still too tight. I don't want the bathtub at all unless I can use it. I must have it the way I want it.'"

THE NIGHTINGALE

"The trouble with Englishwomen is," continued Hilda, "they accept things the way men give them to them. They are brought up to think men know best, which, of course, is all wrong. Everything that concerns their own personal welfare, their everyday environment and conduct of life, is preëminently their own concern. They should have absolute freedom in such matters. What difference to a husband does it make if the bathtub faucets in his house work a shade easier than is normal in England? What is important is that his wife should be able to turn them on herself. Still, if he were in charge of the installation and had the final say, he would probably accept what the plumber told him. No, it is much better for a woman to decide all these matters. She knows best."

Miss Stebbins seemed greatly impressed by Hilda's wisdom and business sagacity.

"I see you have only one bathroom here. In America I hear every one has so many. How many have you in your house at home?"

"We have four; one for guests, one for the children, one for my husband and me, and one for the maids."

"The maids! — do they have one?" asked Miss Stebbins.

THE NIGHTINGALE

“It is one of the sorrows of my life that we have n’t five,” continued Hilda. “Then there would be one for relatives. Relatives, of course,” she pursued, “are not exactly guests. They usually stay longer, for one thing. It is sometimes awkward when there are guests at the same time. Yes,” she concluded, “I have always thought I would be perfectly satisfied if I had just one more.”

Miss Stebbins pondered for a moment or two. She walked to the little window and looked out at the orchard below. It looked very pastoral with the lambs browsing about beneath the trees.

“How nice it is to have a pleasant view from a bathroom. I have several small rooms with excellent views. Two of them have fireplaces. Do you think they would be all right in a bathroom?”

“An open fire in a bathroom? The height of luxury!” responded Hilda. “And a view from the windows — how perfect! Oh, do let me go home with you, Miss Stebbins, and see the rooms. I can’t wait. Of course, they ought all to open off bedrooms. Don’t say that they do. That would be too wonderful — it would be like heaven!”

THE NIGHTINGALE

“No,” replied Miss Stebbins, picturing mentally the various halls and corridors and rooms of her big, straggling house. “No, one of them will be by itself, up in a tower.”

“Oh, how lovely,” said Hilda. “You will have to get a princess. Do you go up to it by a little winding stair?”

“Yes, you do, and there is a lovely big room just beneath it — all casement windows and sunshine.”

“How lovely!” sighed Hilda. It was too rapturous to be true.

“It *will* be pleasant,” responded Miss Stebbins. “I shall call it Lætitia’s room, and she shall always have it when she comes to visit me.”

She had heard Hilda speak of Lætitia, and liked the name.

Miss Stebbins was somehow being carried away on a wave of enthusiasm. Her whole nature was expanding into a sort of fourth dimension of enterprise and good will to man.

“How many bathrooms do you think you will have altogether, Miss Stebbins?”

“Well, I had thought of two, but since you say you need five in your house, which is smaller, I perhaps ought to have six — yes, I will have

THE NIGHTINGALE

six," she added with finality. "Now I must go home and see where to put them. Can't you come, too? Do, to help me. You have such excellent ideas."

CHAPTER XIX

TWO weeks had passed. The six selected rooms in Miss Stebbins's house had been cleared out, ready to be torn up; an indefinite number of candles had been supplied for the use of Tommy, the back hallways, the cellar, and the outbuildings were all pleasantly littered with boxes and crates — in fact, there was an air of bustle and approaching modernity about the whole house. Hilda had been kept very busy advising Miss Stebbins, and working every possible odd moment with Mr. Cummings. He had imported a plumber from Bristol to help him, who was familiar with the joints and joinings of the particular brand of plumbing Miss Stebbins had selected. Mr. Cummings himself was in charge, and highly elated about life in general. Was not everything turning out as Mrs. Maneley said it would? In a week more he would see Dora, and though he did not know how Mrs. Maneley was going to consummate an engagement when the only thing that seemed to point at all in that direction was his own consuming passion, still he had faith. He had the

THE NIGHTINGALE

supremest trust in Hilda's ability to accomplish what she set out to do, and waited patiently for her to explain at her own good pleasure her line of action.

One Sunday afternoon, after a long *détour* embracing various conductors, singers, soloists, and composers, Hilda switched on to the subject of Dora.

"You may not like what I am going to suggest, Mr. Cummings," — Hilda at times had a nice, businesslike way of coming directly to the point, — "but of course we must begin to plan how to get you engaged to Dora. I don't know how much you know about women, but my observation has been that the best way to win a woman's love is to make her jealous — just jealous enough, and just long enough. Things usually work very fast when people are jealous. So what we must do is to make Dora jealous on the day of the concert. I don't see anybody else to make her jealous of but me."

Mr. Cummings looked slightly alarmed. He evidently wondered what Hilda's next proposal would be.

"I should be very glad to go with you and try to make her jealous if you would allow me. Of course, I ought to be younger and far, far

THE NIGHTINGALE

prettier, but I have a very pretty dress and hat, and I'll wear a veil. I may look quite engaging, from the platform. We will arrange to have her know where you are going to sit and she can be jealous all through the concert. That will be just long enough. Afterwards we will see her, and I will tactfully leave you. Then, Mr. Cummings," said Hilda, severely, "it will depend entirely upon you. You must n't be the least bit meek. Women hate meek men. We all long in our souls to be ruled. Just let her see that your life through my influence has had so much put into it that you can get along very well without her. Show her you know something about music. I will tell her what a wonderful pupil you are. We will hope that at that moment she will be at just the right stage of jealousy. Then, when you see unmistakably that she repents all the silly things she has said, you can tell her I'm married and all about it,—but don't divulge too much till she comes to her senses and sees that what she wants is n't to marry a musical dictionary or a pianola. She must see that what she wants to marry is a *man*.

"Now, Mr. Cummings, do you think you can do all that? I really think that between us we

THE NIGHTINGALE

can work it. But you must get the idea out of your head that Dora is so superior to you. She is infinitely inferior." Hilda put a slight emphasis on the "in." "Of course, being in love, you will never believe it, but you must assume it as a working hypothesis. Tell me you will do it all just as I want you to! I have worked so hard to make you happy. You must be good and rule Dora with a firm hand, at least till you're married. Promise me you will do it!"

"I will," said Mr. Cummings, with very much the same solemnity and sense of trepidation about the future that a man says, "I will," when he is married.

²⁰ "Now that is very nice of you. There's nothing more to do except write Dora a letter to tell her you are bringing a friend with you, and where you will sit. Say you hope she will look over in your direction as she comes on the stage, etc., etc. Now you write the letter. Do you mind letting me see it when it is finished? I want to be sure you get in all the important points."

No, Mr. Cummings would be glad of her help. The future looked difficult, but he had an idea it was coming out all right. Mrs. Maneley thought of very curious ways of doing things

THE NIGHTINGALE

—different from what most people would ; still, they always seemed to accomplish their ends.

The change in Mr. Cummings in those two weeks was little short of marvelous. He had lived at home quietly with an adoring little mother. She had cooked for him, made him comfortable, kept him mended, and despaired of any more, though she felt there was a lack somewhere. He had an absolutely unschooled and untutored mind, very sensitive and remarkably quick and responsive when the right stimulus of sympathetic interest was supplied, but he had never, even as a child, had any congenial companionship. Dora had found him all right as an admiring suitor in a dog-like way till, a wider horizon opening before her because of a certain technical gift, not because she had much real feeling for music, she had marched off to Bristol for two years' study to fit her to be a teacher to the youth of Porlock. All this time she had wobbled in her loyalty to poor Mr. Cummings. The break came in the cruel little note that had so unnerved him during his life-and-death struggle with the faucets.

The day of the concert dawned. Hilda and Mr. Cummings started off in great spirits. Acting on Hilda's advice, and feeling himself he

THE NIGHTINGALE

could afford it with Miss Stebbins's commission an accomplished fact, he had bought in a neighboring metropolis a dark blue serge suit. He had gone fifty miles to get it, which is a long way in England. Hilda had advised him as to his hat and collar. She herself chose the necktie. It possessed the quality of quiet elegance. It was astonishing what a touch of cosmopolitanism and boulevardieriness it imparted to Mr. Cummings.

"We will have lunch at the Golden Crown."

If only she had arranged some way to have Dora see them there! She began to be afraid Dora was not going to be jealous enough, after all. One hour's jealousy, unless very fierce, may not lead to action. Englishwomen don't admire the American type—perhaps she would n't think Hilda pretty. Even with the kindly veil canceling and blurring her irregular features the total effect of hat and gown might not prove sufficiently alluring seriously to disturb Dora's peace of mind. Besides, perceptions steal into English minds slowly. Dora might be jealous, but she might not realize she was jealous till eight o'clock that evening, which would be too late. They had planned to go home on the 6.30 train. Mr. Cummings was to have one hour and

THE NIGHTINGALE

ten minutes to work out his destiny. Hilda had assured him that was plenty.

Lunch went off pleasantly, Mr. Cummings a shade nervous. Hilda wished there were some way she could give him a cocktail. Still, the effect might be too stimulating. She wanted him to be in command of all his forces, quite at his ease.

They went to the hall early so as to get the exact seats which Mr. Cummings had written Dora he would take, and which Dora had amiably consented to gaze at.

On the platform stood a piano, its sturdy legs hidden behind a few scattered palms. Mr. Cummings, with his eye for measurements, — carpenters and plumbers get to have a very quick eye for distance, the effect, I suppose, of always carrying a collapsible yardstick in their pockets, — saw at once with satisfaction that Dora, as she sat at the piano, would be entirely visible to him between the palms.

“I think we have chosen very good seats,” he said to Hilda; “can you see the piano stool? I can, perfectly. Perhaps you would like to change.” It is thus in modern life we show our heroism. The ancient martyrs were not the only examples of self-sacrifice. Fortunately, Hilda

THE NIGHTINGALE

could see beautifully, so to Mr. Cummings's joy they both remained where they were. They commented, as people always do, on the stuffiness of the hall. Finally the first pupil appeared. The paper said next morning, "She showed great natural ability." Others followed. Quite a way down on the programme, a sallow youth played on the violin, and two young ladies followed with piano solos.

Then came the trio. Miss Lottie Stone, Miss Hazel Wood, and Miss Dora Tree, all in virgin white, each with a rose carelessly adjusted in her hair and another to balance it, even more carelessly adjusted in her belt, took their places.

Dora, after slipping composedly on to the stool and adjusting her dress on the side toward the audience, looked at "D5." Hilda took pains to lean over rather ostensibly at that second and speak to Mr. Cummings with just the slightest air of proprietorship, — just a shade has such carrying power when properly fused into one's manner.

Even at that distance Mr. Cummings saw a light flash into Dora's eye. She readjusted herself on the piano stool a little nervously and looked again, — one of those bored, professional glances that artists throw around a room and

THE NIGHTINGALE

up at a ceiling, as though taking a detached and casual interest in its architecture, before settling down to play. Dora's glance took in "D5" on its way. Though not a personal look, it was still a second one, and Mr. Cummings felt encouraged. He grew strangely happy. Dora played very agreeably. Hilda was gladder than ever that Mr. Cummings was to marry her. She could see now why Dora had decided Mr. Cummings was not a suitable helpmeet. It was true they would never have been happy if Mr. Cummings had not been metamorphosed into the blooming creature at her side. Dora was not, to Hilda's way of thinking, very pretty. She looked a shade too opinionated and assured.

"She needs a strong hand," thought Hilda. "I must warn Mr. Cummings the last thing to be firm and hard as Gibraltar — otherwise he will fail."

Mr. Cummings leaned forward, his hands clasped in his lap, adoration and worship pouring out of his eyes, the music pouring into his ears, rapt and silent. When it was all over he led the vociferous applause. With three young ladies performing, a larger proportion than usual of interested listeners participated in the clapping.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Miss Hazel, Miss Lottie, and Miss Dora all came out and bowed. Hilda decided then she was going to like Dora. She was very graceful, and as she bowed in response to the applause, she showed a gentle dignity and quite spontaneous pleasure that were very engaging. "She has nice hair and eyes," thought Hilda. "I do hope she has nice teeth."

"Well," said Mr. Cummings, turning to Hilda, "how did you like her playing?" He was dying to know if Hilda liked Dora herself, but had too much pride to ask. "Where do you think she will go now? Do you think she will come out in the audience?"

"Oh, she is lovely, lovely — she plays charmingly. No, she will stay in a back room and freeze, and be bored instead of coming out and enjoying the rest of the programme like a rational being. That is the way real artists always do. I cannot see why," said Hilda.

"Well, it will soon be over." Mr. Cummings could wait contentedly. Dora had made a good impression. He looked at his watch. "By fifteen I suppose I will see her."

His tense muscles relaxed, and he leaned back to listen politely to the other less gifted performers.

THE NIGHTINGALE

The rest of that afternoon I will not describe. Suffice it to say that Dora broke away from the age-worn convention of concert halls and stole out into an empty seat which she had spied from the platform. During a short solo part for the violin, she had swept her eye over the hall and discovered it. She had also taken advantage of one particularly long rest in the piano score to make sure that the pretty and vivacious lady was with Mr. Cummings. From her vantage-point when she slipped into the empty seat (it was five rows back, and had a good northeast view of Hilda's back), she studied every bit she could see; the lovely poise of her head, her quick play of expression, the smart lines of her hat and gown,—alas, she could only see it around the neck,—the masterly touch to her veil, the easy charm of Hilda's manner.

Dora decided she hated her. "She is the American he wrote me he was studying with. She shall not have him. I will give him lessons myself. I know much more than she does. I'm sure she thinks of nothing but clothes." She was dying to see if Hilda powdered. That would be the last straw. If Mr. Cummings had succumbed to a lady of that type, he was beyond saving. She could hardly wait for the concert

THE NIGHTINGALE

to end to see Hilda face to face. Curiously enough, she had n't the faintest trace of awkwardness or embarrassment in the thought of the meeting. She was simply bursting with a desire to study Hilda more closely. She did n't know what she was going to do, but she was going to fight to save Mr. Cummings from "that creature." It never occurred to her that Hilda was not already prone at Mr. Cummings's feet, and probably he at hers. Why would she have come all the way to Bristol to a concert with him if she were not? She noticed the spruceness of Mr. Cummings's attire.

"If I can only get him alone," she thought.

All her joy in Brahms had died away. The hours of practice she had put in to get that smooth lovely *adagio* were forgotten. All she wanted was to have Mr. Cummings say he loved her. She thought of the hundreds of times when she had been bored to death by his devotion. Could she ever get it back? He looked so well. He couldn't be unhappy and look as well as that. He must like the lady.

By wonderful yet not too glaring finesse, Dora managed to bump into Hilda and Mr. Cummings as soon as they got well started down the aisle. It was too crowded for either Mr.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Cummings or Dora to attempt to carry out any prearranged plan, though each had been thinking up a very good one during the concert. They simply looked into each other's eyes. They were only able to say nervously, "This is such a jam. We must go where it's quiet."

Dora did n't even have a chance to look at Hilda. She had decided that if the powder were only on her nose she could forgive it. Everybody does that. Hilda had quietly disappeared into space. She saw from Dora's expression that everything was coming out all right, and simply said, hurriedly, to Mr. Cummings, — Dora was farther down the aisle, out of earshot, — "I'll meet you at the station at six. Be sure to be there. I want to be the first to congratulate you. She is lovely. Above all, be *firm*."

Then Hilda flew off and did some shopping.

She arrived at the station at 6.05. Sitting in a corner, looking pale and subdued outwardly, were Mr. Cummings and Dora. They looked as though nothing in the whole world mattered any more. You could see from their eyes that they had passed through a great crisis. They were different people.

They both got up and came toward Hilda.

THE NIGHTINGALE

"We cannot thank you enough," they both said. "We can never, never thank you."

Tears were in their eyes.

"You are both sweet children, and I am so glad," said Hilda.

"You are coming over to visit me for Sunday, are n't you?" she said to Dora, as they parted. "Say you will. We must be friends. We will meet you at the 4.10 on Friday."

She and Mr. Cummings jumped on the train. (There was no later one that night or he would have stayed over. Alas, duty in the shape of Miss Stebbins's bathrooms called him at seven the next morning.)

"Congratulations, my warmest congratulations," said Hilda, as they sank into their seats. "She is a darling."

"I would never have dared do it. It would never have happened," said Mr. Cummings, "if you had n't explained infinity to me. That put courage into my heart. It just shows how much easier everything is when you understand it."

With this cryptic utterance the conversation died, for they were both tired. Mr. Cummings thought of Dora, Hilda of Horace and the children. For the first time in weeks she thought, too, of the nightingale.

THE NIGHTINGALE

“I will never have time to look up that bird, or even to listen to its song unless it’s a very short one. I seem to be so fearfully busy. Still there’s a good deal to show for it,” she thought. “Four people are happy and I know more about music than I did.”

CHAPTER XX

IT was April in England, and the bathrooms were enjoying that first fine, careless rapture before the nickel gets the least bit tarnished or the curtains have to be taken down to be washed. Each bathroom seemed to have a prettier view than the last. Hilda and Miss Stebbins were never tired of looking at them (the baths) or out of them (the windows).

“You ought to give a house party and have them all used at the same moment,” said Hilda. “It is wicked not to have them enjoyed. Why don’t you enjoy them yourself? Use one as a breakfast-room, one as a little boudoir, one as a reception-room when the curate drops in for tea, etc., etc.” As usual her mind flew off into the details of this charming arrangement.

“No,” said Miss Stebbins. She was beginning to understand Hilda’s whimsicalities, and took a certain fierce joy in trying to play up to them. “No, they are too beautiful for anything less important than a bishop. The curate will never see them.”

Hilda stayed the whole morning with Miss

THE NIGHTINGALE

Stebbins on the day of this conversation, and went home with the back seat of the car full of roots and baby plants, and straggling, unlivable-looking vines, which Miss Stebbins assured her would flourish. The six bathrooms had, so to speak, cemented their friendship, and Miss Stebbins outdid herself in little neighborly attentions.

"Just think," she smiled up at Hilda as she drove off, "you have brought motoring and bathrooms into my life. I shall always be grateful."

That afternoon, as Hilda and Suzetta sat in the dirt surrounded by trowels and a watering-can and a wheelbarrow and all the other concomitants of gardening, a fearful thought came to Hilda. She was just digging a hole for a daffodil, but she let it drop, and all its petals got broken. She stood up and started for the house.

"What is the matter, signora? Are you ill?"

"No," said Hilda, "but I've got to see Miss Stebbins. I told her to have a house party, and I'm afraid she may begin to plan for one. Suzetta, I've just had an appalling thought. I persuaded Miss Stebbins to put in all those

THE NIGHTINGALE

bathrooms, and I never thought till now, there is n't any water. There is only one well. I should have thought. That miserable little pump, if it worked its head off, could n't pump into the tank any more water than there is in the well. There's only enough for one bathroom."

Even Suzetta, who always looked on the bright side of things, looked perturbed when she heard of this complication.

"Never mind," said Suzetta. "Miss Stebbins will only use one. It is all right. Do not be unhappy, signora."

"That is true, and the maids won't use theirs," added Hilda, her face brightening. "It will probably take them several months to get used to the idea. Perhaps I need n't worry, after all. All I will have to do will be to prevent the house party. Then I can think about water. It will cost millions to get a proper water supply. Poor Miss Stebbins — will she ever forgive me? This is all the result of being mixed up with love affairs. One cannot think well. I won't tell Miss Stebbins, though," she said, "not till I've thought of some plan that will make it come out all right. It's got to be cheap, too," she added, as a corollary to the plan in general.

THE NIGHTINGALE

She walked back to the flower-bed and planted the disgruntled daffodil, who looked up reproachfully at her, as though the least she could do after injuring him for life would be to carry him to a hospital. But Hilda's mind was on other matters, and she simply slammed the daffodil into line with the others, and began absent-mindedly to water the whole row.

The idea of a house party simmered along in Miss Stebbins's mind during the afternoon. Mrs. Maneley always had such excellent ideas. The fact that it was her suggestion made it worthy of special consideration because all her ideas turned out so well. It might be better to wait till summer—still, May was a lovely month. She decided to have it in May. She began thinking of the people. Of course a bishop. She knew several. She decided to get one from a distance. He would enjoy it more because the country would be new to him. She would ask one who was just back from Madagascar. Of all the bishops in the world he would probably revel most in the thought of a room with connecting bath.

As the name of each guest was added to her list, Miss Stebbins experienced the same little flutter of pleased excitement as she thought of

THE NIGHTINGALE

the pleasure and surprise her guests would display when they were shown to their rooms.

She could hear their chorus of "Enchanting!" "Such luxury!" "So clever!" "Six, fancy!" "Sweet!" "Fascinating!" "Quite!"

Those were happy moments for Miss Stebbins. She was planning to ask one or two relatives who, mindful of her former idiosyncrasies, had a very unpleasant fashion of saying, "Such a waste of money!" whenever they heard of any new undertakings. This time they would see she was not such a fool as they thought!

Her list completed, she decided to wait till evening to write the notes. She took up a volume of Maeterlinck. She wanted to get as far away as possible from this mundane world, for, to tell the truth, plumbing carried out on such an extensive scale is an undertaking about as colossal in the ordinary household—to put it in the form of a ratio—as the building of a canal is to a nation. Harder, really, because you are so close to it all the time. Some of the people in a nation are not disturbed by a canal; everybody in a house is upset by plumbing.

But try as she would, Miss Stebbins's subconscious mind was at work on the house party.

THE NIGHTINGALE

“Those bathrooms are going to save so much trouble,” she thought to herself. “Other house parties the maids have been worn out carrying water. Now people can just turn on the faucets” — they all turned easily, thanks to the good training Mr. Cummings had received under Hilda — “and use gallons and gallons with no trouble to anybody.”

“Gallons and gallons,” — the very words had a fascination. She thought of the tubs brimful to the top. As Hilda had said, “Everybody can take a dozen baths a day — it’s perfectly wonderful to think of all that can be accomplished without bothering a soul.”

But the word “gallons” had a sort of death-knell cadence to it. Why did it stick in her mind? She was just starting a new chapter which had nothing whatever to do with “gallons.”

“Gallons, gallons,” — Miss Stebbins suddenly turned pale and Maeterlinck fell in her lap. Of course she saw now — it was only too plain — why that word had been hammering its way into her consciousness. There were no gallons! Usually there were not more than quarts. Her castle of cards fell to the ground. Where would the gallons for the dozen baths a day come

THE NIGHTINGALE

from? Try as she would, there was only one answer, "Nowhere. They were not to be had."

Of course she could have her party just the same, and have interminable pitchers of water brought in, just as had been done in England for hundreds and hundreds of years, — but she had too much pride for that. The guests would not care to look at the bathtubs. They would want to use them.

"No; I will have to get an artesian well before I entertain. Fortunately there is enough for one bath. I can use mine. Whatever happens I must not tell Mrs. Maneley. She has been so sweet about it. How could I have been so stupid as not to think of the water? I know — it's because my mind got sidetracked on the view. I was so anxious to get a pretty outlook from each window — that was all I thought of. Well, there's no fool like an old fool," said Miss Stebbins, philosophically.

She turned out the light and went to bed. As she tossed sleeplessly on her pillow she thought more kindly of the critical relations than she had in years.

"Perhaps they are right," she sighed, "after all."

Alas, she had n't Hilda's optimism. She

THE NIGHTINGALE

could n't comfort herself with constructive thoughts for the future. All her mind could do at this juncture was to accept the inevitable. She decided to consult Mr. Cummings. Perhaps he could suggest something. Very nobly she refrained from blaming him.

"I did not ask him to supply the water. I did not ask him if he thought there was sufficient. I simply told him to put in six bathrooms," she said. "He did what his contract called for. They are all connected with the tank. No, I cannot blame him."

The next morning Mr. Cummings, to whom life at this moment was one glad, sweet song, came to see what further he could do for Miss Stebbins. She had left word she wished to see him about some new scheme she was considering. She explained briefly her predicament.

"It seems strange none of us should have thought of the water. 'Too many cooks,' I suppose."

"No, I think the trouble was," said Mr. Cummings, "our anticipations were raised too high. We all saw those bathtubs the way a bathtub ought to be, with the water running into them and the water running out of them. Everything in working order. As I made all the connec-

THE NIGHTINGALE

tions," continued Mr. Cummings, "I always saw them, in my mind's eye, being used." (Miss Stebbins blushed slightly.) "The trouble," he concluded, "was that we all looked too far ahead."

"We were all so pleased at the thought of the pleasure they would give. I suppose Mrs. Maneley would say that's because we are idealists," said Miss Stebbins. "Well, idealists have to fall to earth occasionally."

"I feel it is all my fault," murmured Mr. Cummings, humbly. "I should have suggested that we think about the water. Yes, the whole trouble," he went on, "is because I was inexperienced. I should n't have taken such a big job, not knowing more about it than I did. It is very kind of you not to blame me. Inexperience — that's the trouble in this world. We have to learn by experience. It's too bad, though," he proceeded, "it should come to you, Miss Stebbins, so late in life." (Miss Stebbins stiffened a little, but relaxed again as the conversation proceeded.) "I wish I could think of something. Of course, in time you will have to get more water."

"The thing to decide is what to do till we get it," interrupted Miss Stebbins, "or rather

THE NIGHTINGALE

the money to get it—that's the important thing. I am so poor now I cannot think of water for another year or two."

"Mrs. Maneley, now,—if you were only willing to tell her about it, she might see some way out."

He had been in pretty close contact with Hilda's mind for some weeks, and tried to think what she would suggest.

"I believe if you asked her she would say to let it," he said,—“let your house for the summer. She would say you must n't do it unless you got a very big price. Then go off somewhere in your car. That's what she would say. Then in the fall you can put the money in a new well."

"Sink it," said Miss Stebbins, laconically.

"Oh, no! I am sure, with our eyes open, next time there'll be no mistake. Yes, that's what you must be thinking of doing, Miss Stebbins. You must make up your mind to let your house."

Miss Stebbins slept a shade more calmly that night, and dreamed of the Alps, the Pyrenees, and the Apennines.

CHAPTER XXI

THE winter meanwhile had passed very pleasantly in the Maneley home. The children had had their birthday parties, gone to school, when they had n't colds, roller-skated, ice-skated, gone to the dog-show, had carpentering lessons, danced and sung songs — generically, all the time, Christmas carols specifically, during the holidays. Everything had gone on as usual.

As spring came on their swimming lessons would begin. Lætitia's hair had been allowed to grow, and she was wearing it with the ribbon more to the side. Paul's neckties still screwed around under his ear in moments of excitement. Aunt Letty had tried to cure the necktie of this bad habit, but in vain. Paul still roamed more or less freely and wildy through the engine-houses and garages and livery-stables of his section of the city. He was an enterprising child, and had personal friends in every walk of life, from street-cleaners to aristocratic old gentlemen who, walking pompously to their offices, met Paul each morning as he bounced along to school.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Aunt Letty had enjoyed the opera and concerts and lectures and luncheons, for she took up easily many of Hilda's social activities. She had taken her place in the dancing-class, too. In short, just as Hilda had foreseen, the family life went along, in a surface way, quite as well without her. It was n't till months after she got back, when Lætitia told her in a burst of confidence how she had often cried herself to sleep because her mother was n't there to kiss her, that Hilda realized that efficiency was n't all a mother stood for; there were other subtler things that even fathers and relatives could n't supply.

"Nobody tucked me in like you, mother, — nobody ever lay down alongside me and patted my head. They just leaned over and kissed me."

But all this was divulged months after, when Hilda got back. It just shows she was missed.

And Horace? Well, Horace, too, went on outwardly and visibly calm, but with that queer, uncherished feeling in his heart that is so achey and hard to manage. He played squash, and worked very hard, much harder than he should have, — he used it as a solace, — and came home early to tea so as to enjoy a frolic with the chil-

THE NIGHTINGALE

dren, and walked with them as much as he could (the loveliest walks in the world are when a child is dancing along each side of you), and he read motor advertisements, and thought about self-starters for a new car, and sometimes went to the play, and dined out, and dined in,—and all the time he was thinking of Hilda. It was strange how, when she had spent so much time in her room,—been practically a semi-invalid,—her personality filtered about through the whole house. The house seemed forlorn without Hilda's little things lying about—no gloves, no veils, no little notes and cards and programmes, no newspapers lounging on the floor. Hilda always dropped newspapers, and they lay wherever the laws of gravity took them. She never folded them away neatly. It used rather to bother Horace, but it wouldn't now. Yes, he even longed for the foolish bills that used to pour in every month, many of them the result of Hilda's sudden, unexplainable fancies. One bill he still had,—the florist's,—for, quite on her own initiative, Lætitia, who loved to give pleasure, very much in the same offhand and unestimating way her mother did, conceived the idea of sending flowers to her father; and sev-

THE NIGHTINGALE

eral times at the office he had been surprised by débutante-looking boxes of violets or pansies — once, she had even sent American beauties. After that Horace had a secret *séance* with the florist, and asked him to coöperate if he would. As Lætitia dropped in on her way to school and grandly ordered something that suited her fancy without any regard to its cost, saying simply, “Please charge to Mrs. Horace Maneley” — he was to turn her attention toward the cheaper varieties. Horace himself, at home, tried to explain to her — of course, in the most general way — the beauty of restraint, how one beautiful thing was often more lovely by itself; for he would n’t have Lætitia know for worlds that such a vulgar thing as cost crept into his appreciation of her gifts. And the next morning he received one blushing and shy Killarney rose, and a note scratched off in Mr. Waite’s shop, “Dear Father, I think this one looks nice alone.”

Yes, if it had n’t been for the children it would have been an unbearably long winter. Horace gradually assumed a general protectorate over Paul’s hands — it was so hard to keep them clean — and he used, at least once a day, to scrub them himself with a nailbrush and

THE NIGHTINGALE

soap. The little warm friendly hands (Paul was always pleasant about it when the real washing began, he just hated to start the operation), limp and relaxed in his own big strong ones, gave Horace a wonderful sense of love and tenderness. If more fathers and mothers of to-day did little homely tasks for their children, there would be fewer broken families with children gravitating from one parent to the other.

Well, spring was coming and Horace grew more and more feverish. He had, of course, no idea where Hilda was. The last cable was Russia, the March one, but somehow he felt that had been overdone. He had a feeling it was forced. Russia was pretty near the Balkans, which she had promised to avoid. He felt she had done it to throw him off the scent, and very ably argued that probably she had gone in exactly the opposite direction. She was, he felt sure, somewhere in France, working toward Paris probably for April and May. Who in all Europe, who could get there for the spring, would n't do it? Besides, he remembered that Hilda for years had lamented her bad French, and he had a feeling she would spend a lot of time brushing it up.

A nice, twittery, semi-showery morning in

THE NIGHTINGALE

April he sat in his office. The normal, everyday routine was in full swing and some letters had just been laid on his desk which he was too busy to look at immediately. They lay there several moments before he took them up. The top one bore the postmark "Como" and was from Mr. Wetherby, the senior partner, — a nice, thick, gossippy letter it looked, too. Horace felt sure it was not all business. A queer, tight feeling came over him. Could Mr. Wetherby have seen Hilda? Perhaps he was really going to hear news of her. He tore open the letter and stumbled along through it at a furious pace. He hardly realized the importance of what he read. He was to sail for Paris early in April to take up important business there. Instructions would be waiting at the Paris office. Good weather, no trouble with the car. Yes, here it was: —

"We had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Manley only a few days ago. She warned me I was not to tell you her whereabouts, as she said she was indulging in a somewhat secretive trip, playing up to her sense of freedom to allay her gypsy blood, etc., etc.; so all I can tell you is she looked well and happy." ("Same old

THE NIGHTINGALE

words," groaned Horace.) "Her experiment has evidently been a great success. She tells me she expects to be home by early summer. Your business here will take only a couple of weeks. Plan to stay on and take your vacation here together — you have earned a good holiday — and don't worry about the money. I am writing the office and you will be supplied with funds for three months.

"We are frisking about ourselves and having a perfectly bully, irresponsible time. I shall expect you to come over and have one, too, with Mrs. Maneley. She is a pretty good guide in such matters, I imagine. Hope everything in the office is going smoothly. Sail not later than April 20, and go direct to Paris for instructions.

"WETHERBY."

Horace felt rather dizzy and trembly. Well, Hilda was n't such an awful distance from the Italian lakes, and he was going to see her in a few weeks. It simply never occurred to him that he would n't find her. He knew he could trust her. He was sure she had kept her promise to write regularly to Padua. Of course, if he had more time it would be more fun (from Hilda's point of view, such was her love of ad-

THE NIGHTINGALE

venture) for him to trace her in some detective sort of way, but not when he had only three months — and no telling how much of it cut out for business. No, he would n't indulge in any sentimental philandering. From Paris he would go straight to Padua.

He rang and sent a boy out at once to a travelers' agency, and told him to bring him all the Continental time-tables between France and Italy. He marshaled his plans as rapidly as had Hilda herself on that fatal day when she ordered the sugar from Mr. Porter. By tea-time that evening everything was arranged, and he told the astonished Paul and Lætitia that he, too, was going abroad. Loud howls of protest — showers of tears! But he elaborated and said he was going over to bring back mother, — then came the rainbows.

Lætitia said she would help him pack, and Paul said he would give him a milking-stool he was making in the carpentering class to take to his mother. It was a three-legged stool, and he was sure his mother would like it and find some way to use it.

Their only interest now seemed to be to get their father started. Aunt Letty, the darling, was delighted.

THE NIGHTINGALE

"I have had a little extra windfall. I shall send over a check to Hilda. Make her get some pretty clothes before she sails. Be sure and make her get dresses, and not use it to buy an aeroplane — or a pet tiger."

Horace promised he would try to influence her.

Aunt Letty bustled about in the greatest excitement. The week passed somehow. Horace sped to New York, having been kissed good-bye with that blithe unconcern characteristic of children, and having tucked into his suitcase at the last minute two fat parcels which the children were sending to Hilda. Horace managed to divert Paul from the stool. On his father's advice he had changed it to a penwiper.

"We are each sending you a steamer letter. Aunt Letty showed us how to address it," they shouted from the steps as he drove off in his taxi. He would not let them come to the station. He hated family groups in a station.

Horace settled down in his seat, and in ten minutes he, too, felt that curious and health-giving thrill which always comes when one drops responsibilities and sails off for strange adventures. As he felt this sense of rest and

THE NIGHTINGALE

peace coursing through his veins, he said to himself:—

“Really, Hilda was mighty sensible, much more so than I realized. There is something stimulating and constructive about getting away, even if the getting has to take the form of running to be accomplished.”

There was the usual flurry aboard the steamer. Horace was sailing on the *Hætic*; he had chosen a fast steamer. There were mountain ranges of boxes and baskets, fruit till the sight nauseated one. Horace went up to the lounge and scratched off postcards to the children, then went down to his stateroom to unpack. He felt rather lonely, the way one does at sailing, even if surrounded by tempestuous groups of friends. In his stateroom on the berth was a box. Yes, “Waite, Florist” was emblazoned on its cover. Of course the enterprising Lætitia. He opened it and took out an armful of lilies-of-the-valley and a note.

“DEAREST FATHER,” it said in an uncertain chirography, with a few carelessly splashed blots scattered through it, “Mr. Waite said these would last. I miss you very much. Be sure and give mother my package. It is a linen napkin ring. It is very pretty. Will you tell

THE NIGHTINGALE

her I put the cross-stitch on it myself? Be sure to bring me a big wax doll. I will see that Paul brushes his teeth twice a day. A great deal of love from LÆTITIA."

There was also a small bundle, done up evidently at home by an unprofessional hand, and tied with many knots. It had much tissue paper crammed about its internal workings. On top lay a note in Paul's crabbed handwriting:—

"DEAR FATHER, —

"I could not think what to send you, but here is a flask. I asked Lætitia what to send you, and she said to send this, that when you packed your flask in our bag she heard you say, 'This is my most precious possession.' I was afraid you might lose it, so I remembered this old one which was with your fishing things. I miss you very much. I would like an alligator.

"Your loving son,

"PAUL."

With this pleasant send-off, Horace went to bed and got the kind of sleep one only gets on board ship,—provided, of course, one is not seasick, and that the breeze blows into the window. They had good weather overhead, and

THE NIGHTINGALE

though they pitched a good deal, Horace kept his sea-legs going and walked and slept till he looked like a person just emerging from a rest-cure. He was too busy with his own happy thoughts to be much interested in his fellow passengers, and simply observed them in that detached, impersonal way one does in traveling.

From time to time Horace looked at his calendar and pored over his time-tables and planned connections. He had quite forgotten the nightingale. His only thought was to get to Hilda as soon as possible.

It never occurred to him, so centered were his thoughts on the joy of seeing her, that she might perhaps have heard one and be on the ocean that very minute racing back to America, however unwillingly, as fast as her ticket would carry her.

Feeling rather done up when he left home, he had elected to sit alone at a little side table, for he hated the feeling that he was making conversation with strangers. However, he had fallen into conversation with a very pleasant Englishman whose acquaintance he had made the second day out when they skidded unpremeditatedly into each other on the deck. He was a large piano manufacturer, but aside from this mere

THE NIGHTINGALE

accidental contact with the world of music he was himself a real musician in feeling, and in close personal touch with artists all over the Continent. A man of quiet, contemplative tastes, he proved a delightful companion, and he and Horace had many good talks. He, too, was alone, so they decided to dine together for the rest of the trip. The fifth night out they sat very late at table, for it was their last evening together, as the Englishman got off at Queens-town.

“By the way,” he said, as he steadied himself against a heavy roll of the ship, “have n’t you English blood—I mean more than the normal American? Maneley is not a common name with us—it is n’t in America, is it? But I’ve heard it, in fact only lately. Somebody down in Somerset wrote to the office,—a business matter,—it was a woman. She wanted to rent a piano, and was very particular about the tone and touch. That’s the reason the letter came to my desk. She asked if I would personally pick it out. I sent down as good a one as we felt justified in sending out just for rental, and rather stretched a point, for I liked the letter. Perhaps she is a cousin of yours. You’d better look her up—Stoke Pero, Exmoor,

THE NIGHTINGALE

Somerset." Horace made a feverish note of the place in his mind. He had a feeling it might be Hilda. "And the letter that came thanking me for my trouble! I have it now. There was something about it — I hated to tear it up. Strange as it may seem, I'm going to try some day to meet her."

"She's probably at least ninety, and married. That's the kind of woman who knows how to write letters," said Horace.

"Well, perhaps so, but I doubt it." He pulled out his wallet. "Here, you can see it. It came just as I sailed. I've been carrying it around ever since."

He handed the letter to Horace.

As soon as he saw the envelope, Horace realized that it was Hilda. Across the table he saw the familiar dashes and dots. It was a very short little note, very sincere — very engaging — very Hilda-esque.

"Yes, it is a nice letter. I don't wonder you keep it; I wish I had one, too. Who knows? She may turn out to be my twentieth cousin. I must try to meet her. I can surely arrange it. People are always cordial and nice when ancestors are involved, probably because it's like a puzzle — such fun working it out. If she is

THE NIGHTINGALE

my cousin, I'll see that you meet her, too, since you admire her so. Hilda Maneley,—it's a nice name."

Now, of course, Horace had many things he wanted to learn from his English friend, and only that evening to learn them. He must find out all he could about Somerset in general, Exmoor in particular. He also planned to lead the conversation to nightingales. He hoped and prayed there were none there, or, if there were, that they never sang till May. Hilda might already have started for home.

"Tell me, do you usually have an early spring in England? I mean is this an early spring?" he corrected himself hastily. There was no time to waste in generalities. "I'm interested because I'm so fond of country life. After my business in Paris I may run over to England, perhaps look up this lady, just for fun. Would a walking-trip in Somerset be pleasant in May?"

"I know all that country well. Yes, it would be great."

"Would there be nightingales, or would it be too late? Do they sing in April?"

Horace really wished at this juncture that he were the other kind of lawyer — the kind that

THE NIGHTINGALE

pleads at the bar. His questions were certainly very clever and Mr. Banister was so agreeably telling him all the things he wanted to know. Ah, but he was too agreeable.

“Nightingales, so you like nightingales, too! No, you’re not too late. They never sing till May and June. I know one place that’s ablaze with them. It’s not far from Stoke Pero either. I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll join you in a week’s holiday there in May—that is, if you want me. You’re alone. It’s more fun having company. I know lots of jolly people all through that country. How does it strike you? How about the week of May 12th?”

Horace inwardly hoped to be off alone with Hilda by May 12th, in Iceland, in Heligoland, —anywhere where they would be away from people and things.

“Well, if my business does n’t keep me in Paris,” he said, rather lamely, “I’ll write you from there and let you know. It would be great fun, and it’s good of you to suggest it.”

They talked over plans for their trip. Mr. Banister was very enthusiastic, and Horace suddenly realized with a wave of dismay that he was doing very much what Hilda had done that day in the motor.

THE NIGHTINGALE

History, it is said, repeats itself !

However, Horace had made great headway. He knew that Hilda had been in Exmoor and was evidently going to stay there, since she had sent for a piano. She would hear no nightingales till May. He believed he would risk going straight from Paris rather than take the long trip to Padua. He wasn't really so interested in what she had been doing ; all he wanted was to find her. Mr. Banister's letter was barely more than three weeks old. Yes—he would risk going straight to Somerset.

He and Hilda would go away for a honeymoon, and they would leave the piano behind. He would be firm, he would not take it with them on their travels ; no, not even if she insisted. Much as he loved Hilda, he felt that there would perhaps be need of a strong hand, for she was unpractical, very unpractical. Her own ability to carry through the most absurd and impossible things would not influence him—the piano must be left at home.

Mr. Banister got off on the tender with all his British luggage and with many warm handshakings and expressions of regard. He was, alas, an unfortunate bachelor without kith or kin ; but he assured Horace he would not be

THE NIGHTINGALE

one very long if he liked Horace's Exmoor cousin as much as he liked her letter. He was evidently counting greatly on the Somerset trip. Horace had told him he was married, so Mr. Banister felt the field was clear. Mr. Maneley's regard for the charming Hilda would, of course, be purely cousinly, and he himself could sail ahead and make all the impression possible — provided Hilda's age and other qualifications made it desirable.

He had heard so much of the acumen of the American mind. But Mr. Maneley's obtuseness in regard to that letter was colossal! The absurdity of thinking she was ninety or near it, or married — or both! Absurd — preposterous! A slower mind is sometimes better. It can be more penetrating.

Horace packed his things for Paris. The little Norman villages were as lovely as they can be in April — which is the loveliest thing in Europe — the weather was balmy and sunny. He established himself at his pet hotel, which he found just as pleasant and comfortable as it had been seven years before. He dashed to the office to get his instructions. There, instead of a long string of business complications, he found a note from Mr. Wetherby saying the

THE NIGHTINGALE

business difficulty he had asked Horace over to straighten out had practically been adjusted. He had met by chance the men he had wanted Horace to see, so that there was no special work demanding his immediate attention, and he wanted him to feel free to begin his holiday at once. The letter wound up : —

“I’d advise you to start off this minute to hunt up Mrs. Maneley. She told me you and she had some cabalistic way of getting in touch with each other. Drop me a line, addressing the Paris office, when you meet. I shall be interested.

WETHERBY.”

CHAPTER XXII

FREE — free! Money in his pocket — all sorts of adventures ahead of him — no care or worry! Once more Horace had the buoyant feeling Hilda, too, had experienced before him! He was to be saved even the stuffy trip to Padua, thanks to Mr. Banister. That very night he would leave for England. In two days he would see Hilda!

Mr. Banister! What would Horace do about that walking-trip? A dozen times that last day on the Hectic Horace had almost confessed his secret; but somehow he could n't quite bring himself to the point; there were too many complications involved in the explanation. When things are difficult to say it is much wiser to write letters. Then one never says too much. Then accurate and premeditated words can flow from one's pen — no enthusiasm or sympathy on the part of the hearer lures one into confidences that are ungermane or regrettable.

So from Paris Horace sent a brief note breaking the news gently but firmly to Mr. Banister; he told as well as he could the vagaries of

THE NIGHTINGALE

Hilda's *Wanderjahr*; he explained that the only reason he could give for not telling the truth on the steamer was that he felt "shy." He assured him that his heart bled for him, and that the aim of his life would be to find another woman as wonderful and as charming as Hilda; then he would do all he could to "arrange" a marriage. He stated that Hilda was a million, million times nicer than the letter, but Mr. Banister would see for himself, for they must all meet very soon. At some later day they would have their walking-trip. Now he could plan nothing. Everything depended on Hilda's arrangements and predilections. Mr. Banister would, of course, understand that; if he did n't now, he would when he was married.

This letter out of the way, Horace felt better.

Then came the thought of the nightingale. That bugaboo of a bird! He could not get it out of his head. He suddenly realized that if they left Somerset, they might, through the chances of travel, miss a nightingale straight through the spring. They might not hear even the faintest, most half-hearted twitter. If Hilda missed it this year, she might insist on staying over another winter. At times she could be very stubborn and determined. What if she

THE NIGHTINGALE

should refuse to come home simply because that absurd condition had n't been fulfilled?

Horace pondered this problem. He, like Hilda, was a somewhat resourceful person. He decided that the thing for him to do was to take a nightingale to Hilda, put it down beside her, and make it sing. Then she could not escape. She would be in his power. She would have to come home!

Fortune favored him. He was in Paris where there was a bird market. He jumped into a taxi and dashed to the Île de la Cité; there he knew in a little tree-sheltered *place* off the Quai aux Fleurs were birds — chickens, ducks, pigeons, parrots, canaries, finches, linnets, and, he hoped, nightingales! There, too, he knew he could buy various kinds of bird food, all warranted to make the most refractory bird warble. He would compare various nightingales and take the one that gave the loudest, clearest, longest burst of song. The taxi dashed up to the queer little *place*, so gay with its medley of bright shifting colors. The big green elephant-eared leaves on the queer dwarfed trees gave just the right note of contrast to the kaleidoscopic and fluttering mass of browns and grays and pinks.

Horace marched up to a withered-looking

THE NIGHTINGALE

vendor who sat dejectedly gazing into space. He seemed to preside over an unusual number of cages whose inmates were small and inconspicuously colored.

"Rossignol," he said; "je désire un rossignol. Il faut qu'il chante très magnifique."

The man sprang into action. All the birds were hopping about, and he looked very like one of them himself as he darted back and forth, evidently uncertain just which nightingale to offer first for inspection.

He had several, he said, all wonderful singers, all just arrived from the Midi. He had had them only long enough to feel satisfied they were worthy his esteemed patron's consideration. They were not too old to sing — many of the nightingales in the market were. Horace was a lucky man to have come to him first. None of the other vendors knew anything about nightingales.

Besides, they all cheated. His prices were low and he was reliable. Any one in the *place* could tell the gentleman that.

Horace eyed the different birds. The man picked out one cage and set it off by itself.

"This," he said, "is a nightingale."

Horace looked at it with special interest. It

THE NIGHTINGALE

looked unassuming, but, as he remembered, that was the principal thing one noticed about a nightingale.

The vendor saw the glance. He wished to be affable and so gave the conversation a slightly different turn. Was monsieur by any chance a poet? Poets, he knew, appreciated nightingales.

No, Horace said, he was not. He could only read poetry. He could not write it. He was buying the nightingale for a lady. It was to be a present. Above all things it must sing well, because (Horace said this with great emphasis) she was a very, very beautiful lady.

The man — as every man does at the mention of a beautiful lady — became all attention.

“Here is a good nightingale,” said the man. “It is young. It will sing for years.”

He pulled out another bird for inspection.

“I do not know why it is not singing now. It has sung all the morning. The people in the *place* have complained that it did not take time to breathe. They were disturbed, it sang so loud. Yes, if monsieur bought that nightingale he would never be sorry. He would save money. It would not be necessary to go to the opera.”

“Can you sell me food for it, too?” said Horace.

THE NIGHTINGALE

The man unearthed a package which he said was a food-mixture which had been a secret in his family for years. His father before him had sold nightingales. Therefore it had been thoroughly tested. If the bird at any time failed to sing, that mixture would be invaluable. It could be bought nowhere else in the world but here in Paris, nowhere in Paris but from him. The price of the bird including the cage, which was a great point, for the bird was used to it (a sensitive being like a nightingale should not be changed from cage to cage at the whim of its owner) — the bird, the cage, and the food would be one hundred francs. And that was a bargain such as it was disrespect to his father to even think of, much less put into words!

Horace thought only of Hilda. He paid the sum briskly and marched away with the cage and the package. The man kindly gave him a few general directions as to its care.

Alone in Paris! No one but a little drooping bird as a chaperon!

But Horace did not tarry on the boulevards or in the cafés. He simply packed his bag and started for England. He put his coat about the cage on the Channel so the bird would not get chilled. If it took cold it might not sing. To be

THE NIGHTINGALE

sure, it had not sung a note all during the journey, but Horace thought nothing of that. People do not sing as they travel about. Why should a bird? As nearly as he could tell, the bird slept well that night, — the roar of London did not seem to disturb him, and Horace set out the next day for Somerset in great spirits. His station was some ten miles from Stoke Pero. His train was due at eight that night. He purposely planned to arrive under cover of nightfall and establish himself and the bird (he had christened it "Rose," short for *rossignol*) somewhere in Hilda's neighborhood. He must contrive some way to make her hear Rose sing before he disclosed his own presence — as a matter of honor he felt she must hear its song before any home tie obtruded itself.

The train pulled into Minehead two hours late. Horace got out with his cage and a suitcase. The rest of his luggage he left at his hotel in London. Not a soul got out besides himself. The station seemed deserted except for a lanky youth who was floating about in a semi-official way. Horace walked along the platform; even at this out-of-the-way place it was tremendously large and substantial; it looked as though it had been made to withstand the tramp of armies.

THE NIGHTINGALE

At the end of it stood a small motor-car. A man was in the driver's seat. It was a Phord! The man was peering down the platform and on seeing Horace got out and came toward him.

But Horace did not notice this, for he had already put down Rose and the suitcase and walked away out of sight, hoping to find at the other end of the long platform some kind of conveyance.

Peter, for it was he, picked up the cage and suitcase and walked with them toward the car.

"Some kind of a parrot this time! I'm glad it's not a kangaroo. Might be hard to get it home in the motor. Still, it would have been pleasant to see a live one."

So he mused as he walked down the platform.

Horace found nothing to reward his search. There was nothing at the station but the car. He decided to speak to the driver. So he turned back, and as he approached the Phord he saw the man stowing away his things in the tonneau.

"Good-evening, sir," said the man. "Is there any more luggage?"

"But you have made a mistake," said Horace. "No one expects me. I am a stranger. Whose motor is this?"

"Miss Stebbins expected her cousin, Mr.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Morse, on this train. When I saw the bird-cage I was sure you were Mr. Morse. He is always bringing strange things home to Miss Stebbins. But I see now," he said, apologetically, starting to pull out Rose, "that I made a mistake."

Horace explained hurriedly that he was an American. He had thought, of course, there would be a "fly" at the station to take him over to Porlock. From that as a center he was planning a walking-trip. Could Miss Stebbins's man tell him whether there was a livery near by, or any place where he might get a carriage to take him over? And where was there a good inn — either in Porlock or its immediate neighborhood?

Peter rose to the occasion at once. Would the American gentleman care to drive over with him? There was no other train that night. He would be going directly back. He would drop him at the "Ship Inn."

Horace accepted with alacrity. Was there ever such luck? And it did seem good to be once more in a Phord.

"Is there much motoring about here?" he asked. "Such wonderful roads. I should think there would be thousands of cars."

THE NIGHTINGALE

“Well, a few,” said Peter. “People are just beginning to get them. One lady, an American, drives her own car. She has a Phord, too. In fact,” said Peter, “she taught me how to drive. She taught me all about cars. She is quite a wonderful person. She has only been in England a few weeks, but she has already done a great many things. We shall be sorry when she leaves. I believe she expects soon to return to her home in America.”

Hilda — Hilda and a Phord! Where had she got it? But even that did not startle him so much as that any pupil of Hilda's should dare attempt to drive a car. Horace was a brave man, and they seemed to be running along smoothly at that moment. Still in his soul he trembled. Not for himself. He knew that if he were injured it was a simple matter to give him a new heart or lung or steel rib or wooden leg. But the nightingale? If Rose were hurt! What surgeon in all the world could repair a nightingale? He clutched the seat tightly, the way one does when nervous about the driver. He clasped the cage even more protectingly.

“It is the most absurd thing I ever heard of. Hilda drives well, I admit that, but she doesn't know the first thing about the engine. All she

THE NIGHTINGALE

knows is where to put the gasoline. Oh, yes, she can pour water into the radiator!"

Masculine scorn, I regret to say, vibrated in these words.

Peter turned an astonished face toward Horace. He gave a quick high jump which made his knees hit the wheel. Too late! Horace saw he had given his own and Hilda's secret away.

"She is my wife," he said. "I am coming to get her."

If proof were needed that Peter had been well taught, it was seen at this moment. Never, never, in all he had read of foreign ways had he had quite such a thrill as this. He himself, Peter Harub, was in the very thick of a real story-book plot. But his grasp on the wheel never slipped, though I must admit he unconsciously threw out his clutch so as to have better control, and his hand flew to the emergency brake.

Fortunately Horace seemed willing to divulge further particulars. He thought instantly he must secure this man as an ally. And inside of five minutes Peter had the whole story. Alas, not having been to Padua, there was not much for poor Horace to divulge. Simply that he and Hilda were supposedly one, and his own little tale about Rose.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Horace's faith in human nature was rewarded. Peter not only promised to help him, but at once suggested an extremely simple way of getting Hilda to hear the nightingale sing.

"She always gets her petrol at a machinist's shop, about two miles out of the village. I," said Peter, proudly, "am acquainted with her maid, and I know that to-morrow she is going to take a long drive, so she will stop there for petrol about ten. Opposite the shop is a little cottage. A Mrs. Cummings and her son live there. I know them very well, and will ask her to let you stay there overnight. All you will have to do will be to put the nightingale in the open window to-morrow morning, and wait for Mrs. Maneley to drive up; then the bird will sing and you can go home in the car with Mrs. Maneley. I will promise," added Peter, thoughtfully, "not to tell her maid. She is very conscientious, but without meaning to she might let Mrs. Maneley see something was afoot. It is better to keep these affairs just between men."

Horace congratulated Peter on his acumen regarding the fair sex.

"I knew nothing about women till a few weeks ago," said Peter. "It is a wonderful experience. But I see they have to be treated dif-

THE NIGHTINGALE

ferently from men. I am trying to learn. Mrs. Maneley has been a great help. She has given me many points."

Horace agreed that Mrs. Maneley knew a great deal about women, and men, too.

Horace had stopped being frightened. He could see that Peter knew what he was about. He was really sorry now that the drive was so short. Of course, he would n't for worlds have questioned Peter about Hilda. But it was a comfort to know she was well. She must be if she was driving a car and managing things. Well, he would soon know, — he would see her himself to-morrow.

He waited in the car while Peter went in and interviewed Mrs. Cummings. Everything was quickly arranged, and within a few minutes he was comfortably installed with Rose in the front room upstairs. It had two windows affording admirable vistas across the road straight into the machinist's shop, and, by great good fortune, another window toward the west, which Peter said was the direction Hilda would come from in the morning.

Peter had not told Horace about Suzetta; his natural shyness forbade. It was better for Mrs. Maneley to tell her husband herself about

THE NIGHTINGALE

things. How could he, Peter, explain Mrs. Maneley so her husband could understand her?

“In fact,” Peter thought to himself as he drove on to Miss Stebbins’s, “who or what can explain a woman anyway?”

CHAPTER XXIII

HORACE passed a nervous night. What else could one expect when the next day was to be so momentous? He prepared for the night more carefully than usual. If the nightingale got a sore throat, all would be lost. Between the two front windows — which so obligingly looked out on the garage — and the bed, was a solid-looking table which Horace planned to pull up to the window the next morning. Rose's cage would be set there in plain view from the road; he himself would hover about in the background and appear at the critical moment. He decided to adjust his raincoat somewhat loosely about the cage, and simulate as best he could a twilight scene. He would do all he could to give Rose her natural environment in the Midi. He wished he could remember. Had he read that a nightingale only sings when its heart is pressed against a thorn? Was it poetry, or was it fact? But, anyway, he could compass that difficulty. If Rose refused to sing he would simply run down and borrow a steel hairpin from Mrs. Cum-

THE NIGHTINGALE

mings, twist it a little, and stick it in the side of the cage.

That was about all he could do in the way of preparations. Chance would decide whether Rose would sing. She must, for how could any living thing be near Hilda and not warble for joy? But to be more sure he gave the bird a specially hearty supper and filled the bird-cup to overflowing with the Paris bird-mixture.

For the night, so that there would be no possible chance of draughts, he pulled the table over next the bed. He tucked his electric torch under his pillow (he had bought one the better to keep tabs on Rose's health and comfort during the night), he sent up a hasty and burning prayer that all would be well, and he turned and slept.

He rose at daybreak and descended when a feasible hour arrived to take a bite of breakfast. He reassured himself about the hairpin so he could rush down for it later if necessary. Then he came back and settled down to read. Rose still slept, so he left the cage where it was. He would not disturb her till it was necessary. She might be cross if she were not slept out. Her voice would be better if she had a good rest. He read Theocritus. He thought

THE NIGHTINGALE

of Hilda. He fidgeted nervously about on tip-toe. Perfect quiet in the cage, but not, alas, in his soul! He adjusted the little curtain at the window so he could look down at the road without being seen. He looked at his watch; it was just nine-thirty. He pulled the table over to the window. Now there was nothing to do but wait. At various times he leaned forward excitedly, only to find that the hoot of a horn meant some passing car. He did not like to leave the nightingale and watch from the west window. He needed moral support.

Finally, after what seemed æons and æons of time, he heard the peculiar little honk he knew so well—at first a shade hesitating, as though his wife's hand were n't able to get a good, steady grip on the rubber, then two sharp and extremely peremptory honks, as much as to say, "Don't anybody dare stay in my way." He peeped out and saw a car in which sat two women, one of them Hilda. He observed, even in that hasty glance, that she had on a new and extremely becoming hat. She looked more kissable than ever! But this was no time for nursing sentiment. It was time for action. He tiptoed again to the cage and wished nervously he had thought of some way

THE NIGHTINGALE

of counterfeiting moonlight. Should he flash his torch? No, Rose, of course, would think it was lightning and be frightened to death. That detail would have to be omitted!

Horace said in his soul as fervent a prayer as has probably ever risen unvoiced to heaven. He took up a flap of the raincoat and peered beseechingly at the bird, who seemed a little dazed. He cast a swift glance at the car. The bird showed not the slightest animation. It simply looked bored. Perhaps the cage was too dark. Hilda wouldn't hear it, anyway, if it were all bundled up in a Burberry. He pulled off the coat.

He looked again out of the window. Hilda was standing in the tonneau leaning over the back of the front seat gazing intently at the gasoline as it flowed into the tank, her lips all pursed up ready to say "Stop" at the crucial moment. Rose still had a downtrodden expression. It suddenly struck him that Rose might be thirsty. She might sing if she had a drink. He remembered that concert singers, public speakers, clergymen in the pulpit, always preface their flights of oratory and of song with a glass of water. He put fresh water in the bird-cup, but still the bird looked up at him

THE NIGHTINGALE

inquiringly and made no effort. What more could he do? Nothing remained but the hair-pin. He dashed downstairs, pulled one lightly out of Mrs. Cummings's back hair (with hardly a word of apology, but he said he'd explain later), picked up a lump of sugar with a wonderful sleight-of-hand motion as he flew by the table, and returned to the cage. A second's work and the thorn was there — also sugar to take the place of nectar, or whatever it is that nightingales dream of in the way of food. Human ingenuity could do no more.

Hardly caring whether he was seen or not, such was his distress of mind, Horace looked out again more boldly. Heavens! the man was adjusting the front cushion. Hilda was searching in her purse for change.

"Thank God! I don't believe she can tell the half-crowns from the two shillings," he said. "There'll surely be a mistake. That will give more time."

He gave the bird-cage a decided wobble, much as an angry nurse might shake a refractory child.

"Rose, for Heaven's sake, sing!" he almost sobbed.

They were climbing into their seats now, and

THE NIGHTINGALE

the boy was leaning over, bracing his hand on the radiator, ready to crank it, looking up with that peculiarly anxious expression a man always has when a woman is at the wheel and he looks up to say, "Sure your spark's all right?"

Horace tried to be philosophic.

It was absurd to take it so hard, for of course, if the bird did n't sing, then he would just stay there till it did — he would win out in the end.

Hilda nodded to the man as he looked up, and he gave the crank a turn. Nothing happened. No chug of the engine.

"Give me a little more throttle," he said; "I'll spin it."

"Now or never, Rose. Hurry up. Do be an angel!"

Never, never had Horace so lapsed from his steady and habitual calm. He looked again out of the window. He did n't see the bird cock back its head and straighten up its little body. He was too busy looking at Hilda, for if the engine caught, the noise of the motor would prevent Hilda's hearing anything short of artillery.

There was a feeble twitter — a sort of pre-

THE NIGHTINGALE

monitory feeling for the key — a note or two — then a long, happy burst of song.

He saw Hilda hesitate and look around curiously. Her eyes followed the sound and finally fell on his window. She looked squarely at the bird. She certainly heard it.

Horace poked his head out of the window and almost fell out in his excitement.

“It’s a nightingale, it’s a nightingale!” he shouted. “I brought it myself. Wait. I’ll be down in a second.”

He was quite oblivious to what any one might think of these strange actions. He fell downstairs, and flew out of the door and up on the running-board of the car. He paid no attention whatever to the strange lady, whoever she might be. He leaned over the side of the car and laid his hand on Hilda’s.

“Hilda, dear, are you glad to see me? You look so well and so lovely. I have missed you so much.”

His eyes said many other things. It is well that we have eyes to say the things that cannot be put into words.

Hilda at first grew very pale. She looked rather nervously at the boy to be sure that he was n’t going to crank the car and perhaps hurt

THE NIGHTINGALE

himself or possibly her husband. It gets to be second nature to a good motorist to think first of his car, and Hilda was a specially careful driver; she was positively old-maidish about motor proprieties. Not till she saw that the boy had let go the crank and fallen back in open-mouthed wonder, evidently wondering whether it was his duty to grab this lunatic — not until she had dropped her eyes automatically to be sure her emergency brake was on — did she turn her attention to her husband. She really looked severe — that indescribable look all men have seen in women, outwardly severe, but with a little proviso back of it that seems to say, “Maybe if this can be explained I will show you how nice I can be.”

Anyway, the look seemed to encourage Horace; for before she could say a word he leaned farther over at the imminent risk of losing his balance and being irrevocably involved with the steering-gear and brake, deliberately took her face in his hands and kissed her.

There are certain unconventional moments that call for conventional action. This was one. Hilda turned as soon as she could, and said with quiet dignity, her hat cocked over one eye, “This is my husband.”

THE NIGHTINGALE

The introduction was general — it included Suzetta, Bucephalus, the boy, and the entire English landscape.

Order emerged from chaos.

“Hilda, wait just a second and I will get Rose. Then we can go along with you. We will sit in the back seat.”

Horace was dying to sit in the front seat, but he could n't suggest dislodging Hilda's companion. No, he would have to sit behind and gaze at Hilda's back, which, except in the very ugliest woman, is less pleasant than a profile. Fortunately Hilda seemed to realize that Rose was the nightingale and not a lady.

“Oh, is the bird's name Rose? What a sweet name! Roses and nightingales, how lovely! Did you think of it yourself?”

“Yes,” said Horace, proudly; “I not only named it, but I bought it myself in Paris. I named her Rose — when I feel specially affectionate I call her Rosey-Posey.”

Horace looked supremely self-satisfied. There was no doubt he had been very clever. Hilda, too, thought he had shown considerable enterprise. In a burst of affection she hopped out of the car.

“I will go with you to get the nightingale,”

she said. "Really, Horace, I would never have believed you could do it — be so enterprising and original. It just shows what people can do when they are thrown on their own resources."

"It shows what love will do," responded the happy Horace.

"But how did you find me out? I am dying to know. I have *sometimes* missed you, too, — once or twice when things went wrong." This with one of those ecstatic little hugs which seem indigenous to narrow stairways, especially when the right people are on them.

"Oh, I shan't tell you that," responded Horace. "I've worked up quite a sense of adventure and mystery myself! I shan't tell you a thing till we get to Padua. Let's pack up our things and start off on a honeymoon. I am to have three months' holiday and I have a gigantic check to cover our expenses!"

"Oh, goody," said Hilda, who was bursting for fresh adventures. "Life has been very quiet here. We will start to-morrow and go straight to Padua for our letters. We will do that first."

"The only thing that bothers me," said Horace, "is the nightingale."

They were still on the stairs. Under these happy conditions one mounts stairs slowly.

THE NIGHTINGALE

"She's a fairly good traveler; still, she would be something of a bother. But I can't desert her. I would set her free, but she seems attached to me."

This was the natural conceit of man. All it was based on was that Rose had once accidentally flapped her wings when Horace entered the room.

"Why, we'll just leave her with Suzetta. That's perfectly simple," said Hilda. "I can hardly wait to see what a nightingale looks like close by."

Together they entered the room. They started to walk toward the window. Suddenly Hilda seemed to wilt away. She pulled Horace over to the bed and sat on the edge the picture of woe.

"Oh, Horace, sit down. I must tell you something dreadful—an awful thing that I've done. I cannot get it out of my head. You must help me. I cannot look at the nightingale till I explain it to you."

Horace looked sympathetic and resourceful.

Hilda continued: "I persuaded a woman in this village to put six bathrooms in her house and never told her she would need water!"

"Can't she think of things like that for herself?" said the practical Horace.

THE NIGHTINGALE

This was a comforting thought. It rather shifted the responsibility.

"Well, maybe she ought to, but I feel it is my fault, for it was my suggestion."

"The woman ought to be able to do some independent thinking," Horace insisted.

"Well, perhaps I am not so much to blame as I thought," Hilda proceeded. "Fortunately she has n't found it out and I am hoping she never will. I must do something to get water in those bathtubs before she realizes what an idiot I am."

"You are very ingenious," suggested Horace. "Why not get somebody to be Moses and smite a rock? That's the simplest thing."

Hilda considered a second. There were only three available men. She thought hurriedly of their qualifications. Mr. Cummings would not do. He was still too inexperienced to be trusted with a large contract, especially when it was imaginative and a little out of his line. Peter would not do, because of his infatuation for Suzetta. He would want to take her with him up on the rock, and every one knows Moses performed this miracle alone. Horace was not executive enough. He had stroked his crew, he had led his class, but this was a different thing.

Aloud she said, "You could not lead the chil-

THE NIGHTINGALE

dren of Israel, I am sure, — it is quite different, — it is so hard to fit the right person to the right deed.”

“Hilda, those bathtubs have made you morbid. You are talking perfect nonsense. Come see Rose, we will see if we can make her sing again.”

He whistled short, gay little snatches, as though he expected an antiphonal response, as they walked over to the cage. He looked down pensively at it. Men really have a good deal of sentiment!

“It is strange, is n’t it? That little bird has so unconsciously affected my whole life.”

He might have said more, but he felt a slight stiffening of Hilda’s arm in his. He looked down in surprise. Could it be possible she was jealous of the bird? He had said he was fond of it. Women are so incomprehensible!

To his horror he saw Hilda was deathly pale. She pulled herself free from him. He saw she was furiously angry, — no, more than angry, deeply hurt about something. For a second she seemed to struggle to get self-control. Then she said, looking straight at him, with a look so full of sadness it seemed as if his heart would stop beating, “I would never, never, have be-

THE NIGHTINGALE

lieved you would do this to me. No, I would never, never have believed it!"

Horace gasped. What could Hilda be talking about? Had those bathtubs really affected her head? He looked up at her. She was leaning against the table. Horace didn't dare touch her, hardly dared speak. She looked like a whirlwind poised for action. But he managed to pull himself up very straight and looked straight back into her eyes.

"I don't know what you mean, Hilda," he began. "I have no idea what you are talking about. What is it you think I have done?"

"You *do* know what you have done," said Hilda. "You have cheated. You *purposely* deceived me. You knew it was n't a nightingale."

"Not a nightingale!" he exclaimed; "Hilda," — he walked toward her and looked at her very quietly, the way men sometimes have to look at women to control them, — very sternly, and yet very tenderly, — "Hilda, I swear to you on my honor it *is* a nightingale. Surely you don't think I would play such a trick on you. Of course, you have a right to be angry if you think I would do such a thing. You must believe me, though. It *is* a nightingale. What makes you think it is n't?"

THE NIGHTINGALE

"Because," said Hilda, "I know what a nightingale looks like. I have three bird books. That bird, I am sure, is only some kind of a sparrow — it is n't even a lark or a linnet."

"Well, I know one thing," said Horace, with great emphasis, "it is n't an English sparrow, for I did n't bring it from America."

"Perhaps it's a Continental song sparrow," suggested Hilda, her anger quite forgotten in the excitement of labeling the bird, "but it may have some English blood. Did it seem nervous about the Channel? Or did it begin to look right after lunch as though it were yearning for tea? That is an even surer test."

But she did n't give Horace time to answer. Her mind flew back to deceit.

"Tell me where you got it. You certainly were cheated where you bought it. I will apologize. I believe," she said, "that you meant to play fair. It was not nice of me to think, even for a second, that you did n't. But I thought you did it as a joke, without realizing how it would hurt me. I would never have forgiven you," she continued, "if you had n't played fair, even though it was so silly."

Reconciliations are always sweet, even though

THE NIGHTINGALE

somewhat confused. There should never be any third party, so this one cannot be chronicled.

"I bought it at the bird market in Paris from a fearfully old man. It never occurred to me he was n't selling me a nightingale," said Horace, in conclusion. He was trying to pat his hair into shape.

"You are too trusting," said Hilda. "People should not believe everything that is told them. You are not half so clever as I thought you were, after all. Every man needs a woman to shield him as he goes through life."

As she said this, Hilda assumed a somewhat warlike, Boadicean expression.

Rose, with much tact, decided at this point to interrupt the conversation. It is well, for it might have led to a discussion of the suffrage. She gave a feeble chirp. From mere habit Horace jumped up and went over to the cage. His devotion to Rose touched Hilda. She stole up behind him and put her hands on his shoulders, and with a funny little way she had, a quick Pavlova-like change of pose, she slipped under his arm and curled up inside it.

"I am sorry I was so cross," she said, looking up at him. "Forgive me. From now on I will always be good. But I was hurt."

THE NIGHTINGALE

“ Cheat,” said Horace, “ is an ugly word.”

“ I know it — it is ugly and it is mean. I am sorry. I will show you my farmhouse and make you forget it. I will show you my lambs. I have two. We will take them and Rose with us when we go home.”

Horace gave a slight shudder. Two lambs who were growing larger every minute ! Take them home !! Travel with them !!! The nightingale was different. They could manage that. It was easy to carry. Besides, he was very fond of it ; even if it weren't a real nightingale it had fulfilled its purpose. They had lived through moments together he would never forget. He thought of the thorn and the torch. No, he could not leave the nightingale. But the lambs ! Think of the gangplank ! He would look like a professor of zoölogy returning from a sabbatical. We all know that on these occasions every conscientious professor tries to pick up a few little things for his department.

But Horace knew Hilda was still a little unnerved from the shock of the nightingale, so he did n't argue it. He simply said calmly and judiciously, “ It is so easy, dear, to say ‘ take them home.’ The ‘ take ’ part is not so unachievable. It is the ‘ home ’ that bothers me. There is no

THE NIGHTINGALE

place for the lambs. Not unless we send Paul and Lætitia to an orphan asylum. Then they could have their rooms."

"I have thought of that," said Hilda. "There is no place. I have no idea — at least only the glimmer of one. But that does n't worry me. When it is time one will come!"

So for the present the lambs were laid on the table, to speak parliamentarily.

"We must hurry now, for there is all the packing. How glad I shall be to be going somewhere!"

In Hilda's accents was a new thrill of joy.

They went down to the car. Suzetta, whose heart instantly warmed to Rose, was deposited with the cage in the rear seat. Horace and Hilda once more were motoring side by side, once more there were those surreptitious little pats and gay, fleeting glances that are among the delights of motoring.

They had gone hardly a mile when Hilda suddenly said, "Why not go to-day? There is an express train at one o'clock. I would love to go just as I am, and we will have time to stop and pick up your bag. Let's not go to the farm at all, but start this minute for Padua. It is much more fun."

THE NIGHTINGALE

She turned to Suzetta.

“Suzetta, we have just time to get to the station. We are starting at once for Italy. You must send my bags after me to London. Pack them to-night. I will explain it all while Mr. Maneley runs up to his room to get his things.”

Twenty minutes later they were at the station. Hilda and Horace said good-bye to Suzetta and Rose.

“We will soon be back,” Hilda said as she smiled up at Suzetta. “We won’t be gone more than two or three weeks. Take good care of Rose and Scylla and Charybdis. Mrs. Cummings said she would stop Peter as he went by for the mail and send him over to drive you home. You are to stay with her while we are away. She said she would love to have you. We have left her plenty of money for everything.”

They waved good-bye and walked into the station to buy their tickets for London, but Hilda suddenly turned back; she stepped up on the running-board and leaned over to Suzetta. She kissed her on both cheeks. She took Suzetta’s strong, kind little hands in hers and pressed them tight against her face for a second. She had a queer feeling that she might not see Suzetta again.

THE NIGHTINGALE

"Thank you, Suzetta, dear, for everything," she said. "You have been so good to me. We will soon be back. You mustn't be unhappy. I will tell you a secret." She leaned over closer and whispered, "When I come back I will bring Paul and Lætitia."

Hilda gave Suzetta's hand a last little pat.

"Be a good child. Be good to Peter. And whatever you do, don't sew too hard."

She flew back to the platform.

Suzetta sat in the car, the nightingale in her lap. She looked a little tearful, just the way Hilda did.

"I never knew any one to think things up so fast," she said to herself. "I wonder how she will get her children. Surely they are not in Italy."

As they walked down the platform, Hilda said to her husband, "You are an angel to be willing to come. Perhaps it is a little wild, but I am so glad to get away from those bathtubs. We will think about them on the train. You have really been awfully nice about it."

"You," responded Horace, "were awfully nice about that nightingale."

CHAPTER XXIV

HILDA and Horace stood on the station platform, his suitcase at their feet, Horace's hands feeling empty and forlorn without the cage. In Hilda's hand was a handkerchief — her only luggage.

"I hope we can get seats on the good side," remarked Hilda. "I remember it said in the guidebook, coming down, 'Best view to the left,' or was it the right? I forget. It is dreadful to read things like that on a journey; if one got started wrong, and were nervous, his whole trip might be spoiled."

"Nothing could spoil a trip for an Englishman, he can always sleep," commented Horace. "What I'm hoping for is tunnels. I cannot go six hours without kissing you."

"Maybe we can get a compartment to ourselves," suggested Hilda. But she was touched by his desire for a tunnel. "Of course, though, there won't be a tunnel, because a tunnel means mountains, and you know there are no mountains in England."

"I wish the Himalayas were here, or the

THE NIGHTINGALE

Andes. I wish they both were here," continued Horace. He would not let the subject drop, — the tunnel possibilities of such a duplex range seemed to thrill him.

"Well, I wish I were buried under the Andes whenever I think of those six bathrooms," groaned Hilda. "Miss Stebbins will never forgive me. She will tell everybody how stupid Americans are. It is n't so much for myself I feel badly — it's national pride. I feel she will have a poorer opinion of American women, and it would be so unfair, for whatever else we are we are always executive."

"It's just one of those unfortunate mistakes that are always happening in business. Men forget them and sail ahead. That's what you must learn to do if you go in for these large engineering contracts. Let's try to rent the house for her. Then she will get away before she realizes the mistake, and perhaps when she comes back it will be a rainy season and the well will be full. That would keep two baths going."

"Oh, perfect," said Hilda. "That's what we will do. "Let's try to rent it this very day. Then it will be off my mind." Horace seemed a little startled at this suggestion; a quiet little

THE NIGHTINGALE

trip was what he had had in mind. "Then we can leave England with clear consciences. I cannot be happy if there's the least bit of trouble with my conscience."

This as she was scudding along the platform in Horace's wake, for the train had already thundered in. In fact she had had to scream her remarks about her conscience, and Horace had had to turn twice, which is rather difficult when one has a suitcase and is in a crowd, so that his ear would be at a better angle over his shoulder, and could catch better what Hilda was saying.

The train was jammed.

"Well, of course, we must expect things like this when we do things so suddenly," remarked Hilda philosophically. "If we had waited two or three days we could have reserved one, but it would n't have been so much fun. We can walk in the corridor, and maybe the sun will go under a cloud. That will make it almost as dark as a tunnel. Then you shall have that kiss that is worrying you. Or perhaps those people are n't going through to London."

She gazed disconsolately at the substantial, unemotional contours of the English family with whom the porter had cast their destinies. She looked at the suitcase placed firmly and irrevoc-

THE NIGHTINGALE

cably opposite them, and went off in a little day-dream of her own.

“If people only realized it, the whims of porters — the spots they select to deposit one’s luggage and drop one’s umbrellas — are often so important. Only very responsible men should be chosen. Besides the psychic qualities involved, they need a quick eye for measurement and balance. They must know in a second if a rack can hold a bag and keep it from toppling on your neighbor’s head. I do not know their wages, but I am sure they should be very much higher.”

As Hilda was thinking these thoughts, she stood looking out of the window. If there had been time, she would have liked to talk to the porter and learn his views on life.

She had forgotten Horace, who stood at her side. As she looked up at him now she noticed he looked very earnest and solemn.

“What is the matter? Are you ill? Let me get your flask.”

Women think of whiskey in time of trouble when a man is involved; men, no matter who is involved.

“Nothing’s the matter. I am simply praying. I am praying that God will create a tunnel between here and Bristol.”

THE NIGHTINGALE

"But you know, my dear, He won't—He can't—why do you try?"

"Because I shall feel better if I have tried," said Horace, looking very like a good little boy in a storybook. "Nobody ever wanted a tunnel before as much as I do—if I have faith, perhaps one will appear."

Hilda was touched.

"Well, perhaps they will be making repairs on the road somewhere and have some sort of a heavy superstructure that will do for a tunnel. It will be dark. I am sure your prayer will be answered some way. You can make-believe faint, and I will lean over and bring you to and kiss you in the general excitement. Or maybe, after all, those people will get out. Perhaps we are just borrowing trouble."

"No," insisted Horace, "they are going to London. I heard them talking about ordering their tea-basket for Oxford."

"That does n't necessarily mean Oxford today. It may mean a trip they are going to take next Christmas. They plan so far ahead for their tea. I am sure it is n't this trip. The tea for this journey was probably arranged for early in the winter. *Coraggio*, my dear. Let's go and roll up in our rugs and be sensible and

THE NIGHTINGALE

read, and try to think how we can let Miss Stebbins's house."

So they joggled back (the train was moving rapidly) to their compartment and settled down to books and looks, which is a very pleasant way of passing the time. Hilda felt very passive. Horace had so inculcated habits of comfort in her soul that she was always placid as a little tabby when she was rolled up in a rug. They both dozed a little, and talked, and in between times they shot glances at the scenery and had tea at Oxford (as did their English neighbors).

By this time they had all got very chummy. Horace, giving up all hope of a tunnel, had resigned himself to the inevitable, and, stimulated by the tea, became very chatty and agreeable. To be sure, the English, though outwardly cordial, observed their actions with a slight hauteur of manner, an objective interest, such as one displays when gazing at the idiosyncrasies of some strange animal at the zoo, — interesting, but not at all the kind of thing one would think of doing one's self. The hours passed, not swiftly, but still not tediously.

They rolled into Paddington. In the general mass of luggage which impeded the movements of most of the travelers, the Maneleys moved

THE NIGHTINGALE

forward with their one suitcase with the celerity of a crack cavalry regiment. Just as they were jumping into a taxi an enthusiastic group, two women and a man, all perceptibly American, fell out of an incoming one. Their taxis almost collided. A general mixup followed; then a pandemonium of little hugs and giggles. The men on the outskirts grasped hands, as American men do abroad, with that slow, understanding, sympathetic pressure, which says, "This will help me to live till I get home again."

"Well, I'm glad Horace has joined you at last. If we didn't all love you so much, you would have started a lot of gossip. Poor Horace began to look about ninety without you. We all decided you had eloped."

This was the longest sentence in the whole conversation; and that was detached, broken up into little scraps of phrases.

The rest was gasps.

"What are you doing here?" — "Just for the summer?" — "Yes, when we get the house the children are coming." — "We want a garden." — "Do you know any place near the sea?" — "It's got to be healthy." — "We want bathrooms." — "It must be livable." — "Not the least bit damp," etc., etc.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Both Mrs. Hale and her sister were enthusiastic and voluble. In fact the major part of the conversation was borne by these ladies. Men never talk much, especially when the conversation is set at the start at this rapid pace. And Hilda was thinking, — deep in her soul an inspiration was being born.

The word “bathrooms” settled it. She would do it. They had plenty of money, and the place was lovely, — everything else that they wanted; and technically it had the baths, — they had n’t mentioned water. “They are so rich they can buy the place and put in water. They will just think it’s a joke. Yes, I will tell them about it. If they once see it, they’ll take it, it is so lovely. Besides, I’ll feel safer about Rose and the lambs if they are near by.”

Their welfare was the finishing touch.

“We know just the place. I’ve been there myself all the spring, only mine’s a little farmhouse. This is a wonderful old house, full of the loveliest furniture and china, and the most hollyhocky and daffodilly garden. Entrancing! You’ll love it. Tell them we sent you. It’s a Miss Stebbins; she wants to rent it. She’s going to motor on the Continent.”

The businesslike Mr. Hale pulled out a book

THE NIGHTINGALE

and in it wrote a few directions given him by Horace. I admit that Horace felt a shade uncomfortable as he did it.

"We'll miss our train. We must hurry. We're going down to Maidenhead for Sunday, but will look this place up on Monday. Give us your address so we can let you know if we take it. You were angels to tell us."

Warm handclasps, a few more airy little hugs among the ladies, and the patient porters again shuffled on ahead.

Mr. and Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Hale's sister turned to walk down the long platform to their train. Suddenly Mrs. Hale turned. "Are there bathrooms? We must have bathrooms."

She had to raise her voice, and her words re-echoed through Paddington Station.

"Yes, six," answered Hilda, poking her head out of the taxi,— "big sunny ones, lovely in the morning, and two with fireplaces in them. All new, just put in; just think, six!"

Their taxi slid away into the traffic.

"Do you think I am wicked, Horace?" she said. "Don't say I am wicked. I had to get poor Miss Stebbins out of that box. The Hales expect to pay a big price, and now she will get money enough to put in water later."

THE NIGHTINGALE

“ Well, I think it’s a little rough on the poor Hales. Still they’re pretty good sports. They’ll probably take it as a joke, and I find it’s a pleasure over here just to see a bathtub, even in a picture, without getting in it. So they can walk around the house and look at them. They’ll get some æsthetic pleasure out of that. No, it’s all right. Don’t worry.”

Their taxi rolled along. Fortunately it was a pretty long ride and they could discuss the ethics of the situation.

“ Yes, I’m glad I did it,” said Hilda. “ If the Hales only knew it, we are doing them a great kindness. It will be good for their ingenuity. Rich people have everything made so easy for them. It will be good for them to have to confront some little practical problem like getting water into those baths. Besides, if they don’t get the water they will be so fashionable.”

Horace looked as though this might be explained more in detail. “ How?” he asked.

“ Because nowadays it is so fashionable to go weeks without bathing. All our wealthy young men are dashing off to the ends of the earth to hunt. They may bathe when they go to Africa and India where it is warm, but I’m sure in the Arctic, which is, of course, the very quintes-

THE NIGHTINGALE

sence of fashionable sport, they don't. They would freeze!"

"More would hunt if they could afford it," commented Horace.

"Why, to escape bathing?"

"No, to escape women. These young men are probably ahead of the times — enlightened. In time all men will have to run away to escape the modern woman. They will see it is better to go off and hunt animals than to stay at home and be hunted themselves."

"I don't think you are very complimentary to say men prefer elephants, and tigers, and walruses, and polar bears to women. I don't think you are at all polite."

"Well, my dear," explained the impolite Horace, "you must admit that the modern woman — restless, undisciplined, irresponsible — is enough to strike terror to the soul of any man. Every man, normal or abnormal, in his soul longs for peace. Tell me, can any modern woman give him that?"

"I do," said Hilda, with great emphasis; "at least I try to. I'm restless, and I suppose irresponsible, — perhaps undisciplined, at least superficially, — but I do think you sometimes get the sensation of peace. Nobody would

THE NIGHTINGALE

want to marry a canal. You don't want to be peaceful all the time ; it would be stupid. We may have various surface commotions, waves large and small playing about, but we have n't any terrific storms. Everybody needs variety — the ocean is better than a canal, but even on the ocean a dead calm grows monotonous."

"But, Hilda, dear, you mustn't take my general remarks as personal. I don't put you into my discussions of women. You are something separate — apart. You're not a woman anyway — you are a big overgrown fairy. Everybody can see that even if I have n't what is usually called 'peace,' I have a pretty good substitute for it."

"What's that?" asked Hilda.

"Happiness."

"Maybe that's what corresponds in modern life to the old-fashioned 'peace.' Maybe happiness is the new 'peace that passeth understanding.' Nobody understands happiness — or is quite sure what brings it. Peace ought to have a new word coined for it — a composite of two or three others."

Their taxi was rolling now up Suffolk Street, and stopped at the very top, in front of that most delectable of English hotels.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Hilda turned to her husband.

“You are very good to approve of what I’ve done, and to say you are happy. At tea-time you shall have a kiss with every cup of tea. Then you will long for it all day, the way the English do.”

“I will drink twenty cups,” said Horace. “I wish I were a giant!”

And they jumped out of the taxi and ran up the steps hand in hand.

CHAPTER XXV

WHY describe their trip? A honeymoon is a honeymoon, whether taken on a yacht, or a raft on a mountain lake, in a canoe or a gondola, on a train or toboggan! Hilda and Horace were blissfully happy, and that is all any one ought to know. And yet some people — if they knew all — might think there was too much “individuality” displayed. For from London Hilda sent a long and important letter without saying a word to her husband or consulting him about its contents; a few days later from Paris Horace sent one too, every bit as important, and this, too, was sent without the benefit of any external advice. A week or so passed, and they both seemed anxious to reach Venice. That was the next place they would get their mail. They should have wanted to go to Padua for their letters, but each yearned for a cable at Venice. Neither of them knew that the other had written. Each of them expected on the arrival of the cable a short, vehement, explanatory scene, the kind that affords such satisfactory scope for “making up.”

THE NIGHTINGALE

In Paris Horace found a telegram from Mr. Banister. It was brief and disconsolate. It read : —

“Heart-broken. Congratulations. Begin hunt immediately. Perfect confidence in your choice. Writing.

“BANISTER.”

A great weight dropped from Horace's soul. He was not used to deceit. The walking-trip incident was happily closed. Now he could think only of the happy future.

They reached Venice safely. No mail. They kept putting off Padua, there were so many things to do right at their doorstep. Each longed for a cable. Each day they were disappointed. They decided to stay for a week or two, and found a charming little apartment where the obliging signora furnished the breakfast. A lovely arrangement, for it gave them such freedom about the hours for dinner and lunch. These they picked up at any of the beneficent little Italian restaurants they happened to be near. They never had to rush home from the ends of the earth at the stroke of the hour.

One morning as Hilda and Horace strolled into their little salon arm in arm, they saw on

THE NIGHTINGALE

the breakfast table, which was pulled over to the open window, an appetizing-looking pile of letters.

“How nice of Giovanni to go so early for our mail. That’s so we will get an earlier start. Torcello means a good hard day. Why, they’re all for me — all from England.”

Neither showed any disappointment, though it gnawed at their hearts.

“You pour the coffee, dearest, and butter my toast and crack my egg, and sometimes put a bite in my mouth while I read. Please,” said Hilda beseechingly. “Now we will know whether the Hales took the house. I will open Miss Stebbins’s first.”

“MY DEAR MRS. MANELEY [it began], I have very good news for you. My house is let for the next three summers to friends of yours who said you had sent them — the Hales. And now that this is accomplished, I will let you know of something that has been troubling me for the last month. Your suggestion to let my house and go abroad for my health coincided exactly with my own solution to a problem that has caused me much anxious thought. In our excitement over putting in all those bathrooms,

THE NIGHTINGALE

we entirely overlooked the question of the water-supply. Fortunately your friends feel willing to give a very high rental, and aside from that are willing to stand half the expense of putting in water, so I feel justified in starting operations at once. Mr. Cummings begins next week to sink an artesian well (he is working under the direction of a big London firm) and we hope in a month's time that our fondest dreams for the bathrooms will be realized.

"I am going to motor down to Italy, taking Peter and Suzetta with me. They are to be married when we reach Sorrento. She will not be married without her mother being present — very sweet of her. Suzetta will be my maid. I find you have trained her most excellently ; she is a capital seamstress. Then we plan to come up into France and from there to Spain, staying abroad well into the autumn.

"Can't you and Mr. Maneley come on to the wedding? We will reach Sorrento in June. I am so anxious to meet Mr. Maneley and tell him all the nice things I think about you (which I never have time to tell you when we are together, you always have so many new ideas of your own to divulge — what are you planning now?), and do come to the wedding. I hardly

THE NIGHTINGALE

believe Suzetta will feel she is married if you are not there to give her your blessing.

“My very warmest thanks, dear Mrs. Manley, for your many, many kindnesses, and also for sending me such charming and substantial tenants. I was quite overwhelmed by the offer they made me for The Grange. I feel so happy leaving all my treasures in such good hands. Address me, care Morgan Harjes, Paris, and we must all meet at Sorrento.

“Most faithfully yours,

“GEORGIANA STEBBINS.”

Hilda put down the letter and sighed, “Is n’t it wonderful, and she is so pleased. Now we’ll see what Polly Hale has to say”:—

“DEAREST HILDA,—Here we are in this duck of a place. We fell in love with it the second we saw it, and you were right about the bathrooms. They *are* the sweetest ones in the world. We can never, never thank you enough. Miss Stebbins did not seem very anxious to let it—said she had various improvements under way, her water supply was insufficient, she might be wiser not to let it till that was installed, which might mean all summer. My dear, we were ap-

THE NIGHTINGALE

palled ! We said we did n't mind the trouble and bother of workmen the least bit, and as she was n't planning quite as extensive a plant as we thought necessary, we agreed to take a three years' lease and pay half the cost. There's no use having bathrooms if you can't take dozens of baths a day, especially here, where there is so little to do. But even that way it is n't half so expensive as living in hotels and jogging about, which we are so tired of. We are sending for the children, and have adopted your car, your nightingale, and your lambs till you come back to claim them. Your little maid, Suzetta, is leaving for Italy, so we offered to take them. She tells me she is writing you.'

"At present we can only use one bath. It is awful. We all take turns having a tub — there is only water for one bath a day. There are three of us, so we each get two and one third a week — but in June we shall begin to live.

"When will you be back at your farm? It looks lonely without you. Little Suzetta is too sweet. I wish I had got hold of her before Peter did — she would have been such a good nurse for Bobby. She tells me she can sew. No American nurse ever does that, you know. She would have been a treasure.

THE NIGHTINGALE

"Much, much love, my dear. Is n't it funny that that chance meeting in Paddington should have settled us here in this lovely spot for the next three summers? We can never thank you enough.

"Rose, Scylla, and Charybdis all send love. Rose does n't sing. I hope we are giving her the right food. Billy is flying back to America on the Kaiser Ludwig der Zwanzigste (my dear, those awful German names!) for a few days, but returns with the children.

"Much love. Let us know when you return. We will meet you at the station with Bucephalus.

"POLLY."

"It is unbelievable," was all Hilda could say.

"Really better than trying to find a Moses," agreed Horace.

"Here's Dora. I hope Mr. Cummings is n't forgetting to practice. No," — as her eyes flew along the letter, — "he's kept his promise."

"MY DEAR MRS. MANELEY [the letter read], I must write and tell you our good news, also how much we miss you, and about Alfred's progress with his music. He practices an hour every day, sometimes two, and we have so much

THE NIGHTINGALE

pleasure and profit from all the books you left with us and the ones you sent from London. You were so good to send the piano to Alfred's house. His mother loves to hear him play. We play easy duets. Alfred always plays the bass; he is very fond of chords.

"He is to have the work at Miss Stebbins's place, and it will be a good opportunity for him to learn that end of the business. Mr. Wicksam, who keeps the garage, has let us use an old shed of his down the road as an office. He put in a big glass window with Alfred's name on it in gold letters, and in it a bathtub, as you once suggested. It has been a very good advertisement; being almost opposite the garage, people can see it when they stop there. We have taken three orders already.

"Dear Mrs. Maneley, we are to be married in June, and what do you think? We are going to have a bathroom put in our house. It is a little house, just a mile out of the village. Alfred said, 'You can have anything you want in that house,' and I said, 'Of course, a piano, and the sun, and a bath if we can afford it.' He said, 'You can have six.' But I knew it was not wise.

"Oh, Mrs. Maneley, we do owe so much to you,

THE NIGHTINGALE

and we thank you for it all. It was so good of you to plan it all out. Alfred often says, 'I would never have thought of it by myself.'

"He sends his most respectful messages, and we both thank you for the musical paper. The last one told all about Louise.

"When we are in London we are going to the opera every night. I hope you will be back in England soon.

"DORA TREE."

"In a year or two Mr. Cummings will be one of the leading musical critics," observed Horace.

"The last letter, I suppose, is Suzetta."

"Yes," said Hilda; "it's short, too."

"CARISSIMA SIGNORA, — Miss Stebbins said she was writing you, so you know I am to be married in June in Sorrento. Please, please, Mrs. Maneley, come to my wedding with your husband. I tell Peter we will try to be as happy as you are, and Peter says yes, next to me you are the loveliest lady in the world. I tell him that is wicked, but he will not change it. I am praying that he will not love me too much. Harm will come of it — we must not worship people — we must only worship saints. I am very happy. I am to be Miss Stebbins's maid

THE NIGHTINGALE

— she likes my sewing so much. I wish I could go to America with you, but I must stay with Peter, and Peter must stay with Miss Stebbins. That is his duty. Besides, she is very kind to us and he gets a very high price each month. But some day we will come to America to see Lætitia and Paolo.

“I think so many times of the happy times we had in Bucephalo. Do you remember that nice man, Jean, at Agay, and Signor Wetherby’s chauffeur who gave us the soap? He was so kind to help with the lambs. There are a great many nice men in the world, but Pietro is the nicest.

“Your friends the Hales have taken Rose and Scylla and Charybdis for me. They like Charybdis better, but I have explained Scylla is not so strong, and they must be specially kind to him. Both the lambs miss you.

“Bucephalo seemed very sad after you left. The Hales never put the top up; they think it looks better with it down.

“Peter sends his highest compliments. We shall hope to see you and Mr. Maneley in Sorrento. Do not ever forget me, will you, dear signora?

“SUZETTA.”

Tears came into Hilda’s eyes.

THE NIGHTINGALE

"They are all so sweet to me," she said; "they all say such kind things. All these letters say, 'Thank you,' as though I'd been good to them. It is not a bit like when other people are good. Most people would think me a sort of mild lunatic. I've not done a single normal thing. I've not even carried a kodak."

"Whatever else you are, you are not a lunatic," interposed Horace. "What you really are, is a second Noah. You have got all these people assorted in pairs."

"Yes, that's the reason they are happy. If you just manage to find some one who understands you, you'll be happy."

Hilda thought of Suzetta and Peter, Dora and Mr. Cummings, Bucephalus and The Marigold, Scylla and Charybdis, Miss Stebbins and — alas! for Miss Stebbins there was nothing but the six bathrooms.

"I must try to think of some one for Miss Stebbins to marry."

This thought was very stimulating. The very idea of the adventures involved tuned Hilda up for the day.

Horace thought of Mr. Banister. But he said nothing. Hilda would have started at once for England.

THE NIGHTINGALE

“It is a pity Aunt Letty is not a man. She is just the right age, and a middle-aged Englishwoman married to a middle-aged American would be perfect. The Englishwoman would, of course, have spent her whole life waiting on men, and the American man would be used to waiting on women. As a consequence their life would be one long, happy collision as they rushed about doing things for each other. I really wish Aunt Letty were a man. It is too bad — then it would be perfectly simple.”

“But perhaps,” replied Horace, “Aunt Letty does n’t want to be married. Perhaps Miss Stebins does n’t either. She may be perfectly contented just loving those six bathrooms. You say it is ‘understanding’ that makes people happy. Perhaps her affection for her bathrooms may lead to her understanding them and so to happiness. If so, why not leave her alone to puzzle them out? Why not let her live on in peace?”

“She may love them, but she does n’t understand them the least bit,” responded Hilda with great conviction. “No woman can understand plumbing. I am fairly intelligent, and I have had most unusual opportunities, but I don’t know the first thing about it. It is all ‘elbows.’”

THE NIGHTINGALE

"Like a thin lady in short sleeves," commented Horace.

"We must not be silly," said Hilda. "What were we talking about? Oh, those letters. I think they are all angels to be so nice about everything. I just did things without thinking. It seems funny it all turned out so well. It is usually a mistake to be impulsive and interfere with other people's affairs."

"The reason your impulses turn out so well," said Horace, looking up from his egg which he had been gently tapping with his spoon, — a soft-boiled egg needs as light a touch as a woman, — "is because of the spirit that's back of them. Yes, that's it, Hilda. It's your spirit. You're a lovely child, — an adorable woman, — but you're so much more. It's the flame back of it — your spirit. You're a mixture of fire and dew. No one, I'm sure, ever knew you who didn't love you more all the time."

Hilda was quite astonished at this unexpected praise — astonished and touched. Could it be possible Horace meant her — Hilda Maneley, whose whole life was one long record of seemingly unexplainable things? When deeply moved, she always looked inconceivably little and helpless, as though she had to be petted

THE NIGHTINGALE

or die. She looked a little frightened now, so Horace left his egg and walked around to her.

“It is very strange,” he went on; “your surface impression is all evanescent and airy and iridescent,—a sort of fairy foam,—but you always give underneath a sense of solidity and dependableness.”

Hilda stood up, for she knew she was going to cry, and the window with her back to Horace was the best place. But it was n't to be an easy escape. As she got up he held her for a moment and looked down into her eyes. Hilda stood looking up at him, her cheeks flushed, her eyes shining like lovely veiled stars. Her fingers were toying gently with his coat collar. She looked like a little child who wants to be picked up and loved.

But there was n't time; the tears were too imminent. She pulled herself away and walked over to the window. She wanted to be by herself, to get her balance, so she looked out at the canal. It was disturbingly blurry.

It was no use. The most prodigious winks did not avail. Two big fat adventurous and conspicuous tears began to roll down her cheeks. Though fat, they ran fast, for gravity helped them. Fortunately Horace could n't see. Where

THE NIGHTINGALE

was her handkerchief? There was a gondola passing. Would they see a lady crying in a window? But she would n't put up her hand to stop them. She was too proud. Horace would see and know.

Meantime, the tears rolled on. The one on the left cheek got going too fast. It tripped and fell headlong on Hilda's dress! The other one was more cautious. It had very good manners, and besides, a bit of lace broke its fall. It splashed gently — very, very gently — on Hilda's watch-chain.

With these tears out of the way, Hilda felt better. But she must have a handkerchief. She would steal Horace's handkerchief — she knew one was in his coat pocket, for she had noticed its starchiness.

So she turned suddenly and collided with Horace, who had unexpectedly decided that he, too, wanted to look at the canal.

"This," he said, "is the first time I ever ran into an April shower indoors. They ought to be in every household. They are much nicer to bump into than the furniture."

But poor Hilda was beyond mere persiflage. She looked piteously little and pathetic. When you are not used to it, praise unnerves you.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Her nose — why is it that noses are such accurate barometers of repressed emotion? — shrieked aloud for powder. She grabbed the handkerchief and started once more to beat a retreat.

Then she stood her ground and looked up.

“Horace, dear, it is you! You mustn’t say such things about me and not know it is you! Whatever I am, you put it there. I was in this world just like everybody else — just a mere chance collection of atoms — groping around. Inside of me was a spirit. It was trying to find what there was for it to do.”

Hilda did n’t look droopy any more. She was standing very straight, and the words tumbled out of her mouth in little gusts, she was so much in earnest. She looked like a little rapt priestess making an offering.

“When I was little it picked up something here and something there, but it did n’t make much headway. It was discouraged most of the time. It was always being told to be like this or that person, or like this or that standard. Nobody seemed to think it worth while for it to be itself. Then you came along and loved me. If you had sworn you did n’t, I would n’t have believed you. Nothing you could ever do would

THE NIGHTINGALE

make me doubt that you loved me. You loved me just the way I was, and *because* I was that way. And then I began to grow.

“It is very beautiful,” — Hilda talked more slowly now, as though trying to phrase her idea exactly as she meant it, — “so beautiful to give some one a love like that, to impress your spirit on that person and make him know more than anything else in the world that you believe in him. It gives dignity to life. We can make our own spirit, and we can help make other people’s.

“So, then,” Hilda went on ; she hesitated a little — it is n’t always easy to make words say what we want them to — “then my spirit began to grow. You believed in me. The things that were in you and that you were so good and believed were in me began to show a little. You taught me that the most important things are to be loyal, and sincere, and to be kind. That is the reason it is so wonderful to be alive. It is all flux — everybody is growing. We go out of the world a lot of atoms just the way we came into it. The arrangement and grouping of those atoms is so unimportant. The compound they make that is you or I is so unimportant. There are millions and millions of other com-

THE NIGHTINGALE

pounds. But the spirit we take out of this world is *n't* unimportant."

Poor little Hilda. These queer, straggly ideas which she had thought out for herself and had so unconsciously put into her life — as she said, they were all Horace.

Influence is a wonderful thing.

"That is the reason we ought to be good" — Hilda was interested now, and wanted to get her odds and ends of ideas into some sort of consecutive shape, — "because this spirit that we make is permanent. It's the only thing that is. Whatever else disappears — we must keep our individuality, and all there is to that is its spirit."

"It is n't just permanent — it's pervasive — that's what I was trying to get at," said Horace.

"Yes, it's dreadful the way it ramifies out and affects people. It's a dreadful responsibility. We ought to have enough pride, or gratitude, or just sheer pluck, to try and make it as beautiful as we can. No matter what finally becomes of our atoms, our spirits we keep. But, of course" (Hilda's "of courses" were usually a blend of pessimism and optimism), "we all just blunder along. That is why

THE NIGHTINGALE

it is so important to love people and believe in them. No matter how hard you try not to be good, or how lazy and slow you are about being it, if some one just loves you enough, you will have to be in the end. So you see, Horace," — Hilda wound up as she began, — "it's all you."

She looked up again at Horace. She stood just as she had before, her hands on his shoulders, looking up at him like a little child ; and all the surface caprice and excitement that had tried his soul at various times were as nothing. They all melted away. He simply saw — just as he had seen thousands of times before — the real Hilda : her exquisite gratitude and affection ; her impulsive, glowing heart ; the shy, wistful delicacy of her soul, so sensitive and so radiant. Hilda, whom he loved so much, turning to him for help !

In moments like this they both felt very, very humble.

Alas, women are difficult. So, too, at times are men.

Only those who are wise know the right talisman.

CHAPTER XXVI

WITH two gondoliers they flew along down the canal, Horace so busy arranging Hilda's ever-present rug and the lunch-basket in comfortable angles about his legs, that he really could n't be expected to see the landscape ; Hilda so busy adjusting a refractory hat-pin that she, too, gazed neither to the east nor west. It began to have a perfectly balanced feeling, so she stopped a second and looked out of the *felze* for a glimpse into a little doorway she specially loved. On the very margin, so to speak, of her field of vision was a gondola. That in itself was nothing. But in it was a man — a man with curly hair — a man with a familiar little toss to his head — it could n't be — yes, it was — Von Arnim ! His gondola was just turning a corner. Alas, he was disappearing from view.

The unwary Horace, whose only thought was to make the lunch-basket comfortable in its cramped position, was startled by a fierce tug at his arm.

“ Horace, my dear, that lovely Von Arnim.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Now he's gone. Oh, my dear, how can we catch him? I shall die of unhappiness if I cannot see him."

She signaled to Giovanni to stop.

"Quick, Giovanni; go quick down that canal. I want to catch a gondola that just turned into it. There was a man in it, a very, very old and dear friend of mine. We didn't know he was in Venice. A lady in it, too? I didn't see any, but maybe there was. I will give you two lire apiece if you catch that gondola!"

"Hilda, don't be foolish," said Horace, taking command of the situation as soon as possible, as is the way with men, even when it is all being ably and satisfactorily engineered. Men like to come in at the climax. "Giovanni is right. There is a lady in the gondola. I don't feel at all sure Herr von Arnim will be as glad to see you as you seem to be to see him!"

"I am sure he liked me," said Hilda; "I felt it. That is a much surer way than being told. Besides, the lady is probably his mother. He must have had a mother; and how do you know there was a lady anyway? You were looking down at your feet."

"A man," replied Horace, "can see certain charming objects that happen to be on the hori-

THE NIGHTINGALE

zon even if he is looking at his feet. The lady with him is not his mother. I saw her hat. It is not at all the kind of hat an old lady would wear. I am sure that hat belongs to some one who is young and beautiful — not a day over twenty-two."

"Did you see her?" said Hilda.

"No, but I felt her," said Horace (rather wickedly). "I know she is charming. But much as I should like to get a glimpse of her, I am not at all sure they will be pleased to see us."

All this time, of course, the gondola was catching up to the unsuspecting Von Arnim.

Suddenly they overtook him, and with that wonderful way gondoliers have they slid up quietly and politely alongside him, when two seconds before it had looked as though they would involve him in a general wreck.

"Oh, Herr von Arnim," said Hilda, almost capsizing both gondolas in her excitement, "I was never so glad to see *anybody*. And can this — *can* this charming little person be Christina?"

Hilda turned an accusing glance at her husband. His eyes were focused on a flappy hat with little pink roses bobbing on its brim. His cheek, I am glad to say, was suffused by a rosy

THE NIGHTINGALE

blush of shame. Without giving any one a chance to speak, usurping the conversation, as it were, by right of eminent domain, Hilda continued, —

“Oh, Herr von Arnim, this is my wicked husband who said it would bother you if we chased after you so uncereemoniously. Now he will see he is mistaken. Tell me you are glad we came.”

“I am,” said Herr von Arnim. He certainly looked it.

“Men are all alike, after all,” thought Hilda; “if you just show them exactly what you expect them to say and do, they never fail you.”

She turned triumphantly to Horace.

“Herr von Arnim is exactly what I knew he would be. He is delighted. Now we must all have some adventures. We all love to motor. We must find a car and have some trips.”

Here Horace tried to say, “There are no roads,” but he couldn’t get it in.

“We must all be friends”; Hilda was patting Christina’s hands as she said this. They all laughed, and a quadrangular friendship was at once established.

“Do you like to motor, too?” she said to Christina. “Oh, I do wish I could kiss you, I

THE NIGHTINGALE

am hungry to kiss a child. I have n't done it for months. But you are too far away! I mustn't fall in the water, for we are on our way to Torcello. You make me think of my own little daughter Lætitia. She loves to motor, too."

In the midst of this little harangue Christina had said politely that she "liked it very much."

Herr von Arnim now turned to Hilda. He had been hobnobbing with Horace. Hilda saw with joy that they liked each other.

"We must not keep you if you are on your way to Torcello. Christina and I are to be here for several weeks. We have an apartment in the Palazzo Restituto. I hope you are making a long stay, too. We must have many excursions together. I will call to-night if I may for a moment. Perhaps we can plan something for to-morrow."

"I wish you would let us come to you instead, just for a second," said Hilda impulsively. "I want more than anything else in the world to lean over and kiss Christina good-night and tuck her in bed the way I do my own little children. May I?"

She was still patting Christina's hands, nervous, spasmodic, affectionate little pats.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Both men smiled.

“That would be very good of you,” said Von Arnim. “Christina has been staying up later than is usual with children, so that my evenings won’t be lonely. But she will go to bed early to-night, for you will be tired and must not stay late.”

Hilda and Horace waved good-bye and their gondola sped off. Hilda kissed her hand to Christina, and she rather shyly kissed hers back. The gallant Von Arnim looked as though he would like to send a very feathery one along with it.

The sea, fortunately, was calm, so they made good progress and reached Torcello in plenty of time to look about before they had their lunch.

They had talked all the way, so they were hungry.

What they talked about was the cable. They each had a sneaking belief it might arrive that day, so each fell in with the idea of the other that, since they were late anyway, they might as well stop at the Piazza to see if a later mail had come in.

Yes, there *was* a cable. Giovanni had run across to get the letters, and when he got back he laid a cable in Horace’s hand.

THE NIGHTINGALE

"Is n't it for me?" asked Hilda.

"No, my dear; it is addressed to me. But you can open it if you like."

The fact that it came to him showed that his letter had accomplished its purpose. He could afford to be generous.

"It's from Aunt Letty," announced Hilda.

"Uncertain which to please. Confer and send concerted decision. If no answer received to this will sail with children May 20th on Hysteria for Liverpool. Meet steamer if possible."

Horace and Hilda never exactly quarreled. They sometimes differed with greater or less enthusiasm depending on how tired they were. But their tones were never super-icy, their arguments never super-heated. They always in their discussions maintained a well-bred golden mean of quarreling which might almost be termed a slight difference of opinion. It never degenerated into anathemas or tears.

But this morning a slight edge crept into the discussion that followed the receipt of the cable.

"How did you dare, Horace, when you knew how much I wanted the children, and when I

THE NIGHTINGALE

was so good about that nightingale, and when I did it partly, too, to please you, — I thought it would be such a lovely surprise, — how did you dare write and tell Aunt Letty not to do what I said? At least you could have told me what you had done.”

“I did it,” replied Horace rather grandiloquently, “because my conscience told me it was my duty. I did n’t tell you because it seemed simpler not to. Children should not be dragged all about Europe. It is bad for them. Besides, I want to take you home.”

“That is an exploded theory — the children, I mean,” interrupted Hilda. “Statistics have been collected about children who travel in Europe. Eighty-five per cent of them gain over five pounds, about two per cent lose weight, and the rest remain stationary.”

“Hilda,” said Horace, “I am really in earnest, — too much so to fool. Don’t make things up in your head, but listen to reason.”

“With pleasure,” said Hilda; “proceed.”

“It is much better for the children to go to The Hill-Top and have their usual quiet summer. There we are sure of the milk. There is no certified milk in Europe except in a few big cities.”

THE NIGHTINGALE

Horace said this with an air of finality, as though it were useless to pile Ossa on Pelion, and add further arguments.

“My dear, there is no certified milk in heaven. Yet I always think of the angels as healthy.”

“Hilda,” repartee-d Horace with that sort of second-wind air of patience which is so irritating, — men use it more than women, — “it is foolish to talk about heaven. Nobody knows where or what it is. It does n’t prove anything.”

“Nothing can be proved except mathematics,” retorted Hilda, determined not to be downed.

“My dear, I have just proved that no child should jog about Europe.” Horace at this point gave quite a saucy and conclusive toss to his head.

“Well,” returned the vanquished Hilda, “my mind has lost its agility. I cannot cope with these specious arguments. I don’t believe, either, that children should ‘jog.’ It is not necessary to live on railway tracks and steamboats. However, since you feel so strongly about it, I will give in. For lots of reasons I want to go home myself. I suppose,” she added, “you will let me take the lambs. They are very little trouble. They are good sailors.”

THE NIGHTINGALE

“Oh, Hilda,” said poor Horace, whose only thought about the lambs, I regret to say, had been a desire to eat them, “they are such *ridiculous* pets. The children may not like them, after all, and they may fight with Guppy.” (Mr. Guppy was the name of the dog.) “I,” he continued, “really thought of taking Paul an alligator. He asked for one. But I realized it was a wild impulse and refrained. I shall take him something else that’s less difficult to handle.”

“An alligator would be lovely,” interrupted Hilda. “It would be lovely to think up its name. He would look well, too, coming down the gangplank. It would be such fun finding one. I don’t see why you think it’s such a foolish idea! He need n’t stay in the stateroom; he could go in the hold.”

“Hilda, dear,” said Horace firmly, “much as I love you, I sometimes wish you could realize what it is to be practical.”

That is as far as the quarreling got in the morning. It ended up with two reciprocal kisses and an agreement not to reopen the discussion till they got to Torcello.

As soon as they had disposed of lunch, Hilda said, “Now it’s time to finish our quarrel. We both feel strong and can fight it out to a finish.

THE NIGHTINGALE

I am perfectly willing to let you win in the end — so don't get too excited. I will only ask one thing — that you do not say I'm 'unpractical.' It is such a wicked slander, and it makes me cross. I cannot run away as people ought to do when they get cross, because Torcello is an island. So promise not to say it."

"I promise," said Horace. "You can begin."

To his great astonishment, Hilda suddenly crumpled up into a little heap of complete abnegation. Her voice emerged faintly from his coat sleeve. "I don't want to begin. It is silly to quarrel. I am perfectly well now, and I have sometimes been homesick. We will go home as soon as you like."

Horace was too astonished even to look it. He was completely paralyzed!

"We will ask Dora and Mr. Cummings to take the lambs. We will give them Bucephalus for a wedding present. They can carry faucets and elbows in the tonneau. We will free the nightingale, — I won't ever know what kind of bird it really is, — and we won't even look for an alligator! Now," she said, sadly, "did you ever in all the range of the world's history hear of such a complete surrender?"

THE NIGHTINGALE

"I never did," said Horace. "You are such a fierce-sounding person, and yet you are really so tractable. It is very commendable!"

He leaned over and comforted poor Hilda. Tears of self-sacrifice stood in her eyes!

"But, dearest, we won't start this second." Having won so much, the stern Horace could yield a point or two. "Why not cable Aunt Letty not to come, and we will stay over three or four weeks for a longer honeymoon. You have n't heard a real nightingale. We must try to hunt one up. I won't ask you to come home until you hear one. And we must go to Padua."

"I don't care a cent about the nightingale. I am perfectly happy just having you,—perfectly, rapturously! No, I do not want anything else in the world," murmured Hilda.

She gave a satisfied little sigh and cuddled even deeper in Horace's arm.

"And as for Padua—we'll go, of course. I want you to see the horse in the square. Fortunately he is not alive, so you may not hate him."

She suddenly sat up very straight and looked very challenging. "I do wish, dear, to please me, you would try to like horses. It is one of the real sorrows of my life. They have so many uses.

THE NIGHTINGALE

It is wicked to let the children grow up with such an awful example. It would be dreadful if they did n't want ponies. It would be unnatural! No, even though we can't afford them, I think they ought to want them."

"I will try," said Horace. "I will even promise to be a mounted policeman if it would make you happy."

"It would be a nice adventure; I would like to be one, too. We will see. But I have an immediate idea, about the letters. We have told each other everything, even though we did n't mean to. It will be stupid reading them through. Let's not read them. Let's make two packages and tie them together with blue ribbons and drop them into the lagoon—the way the ancient Venetians used to drop a ring into the sea."

"What would Giovanni think? It is harder for two people to be idiotic than for one. It is specially hard for a man."

"You will have to learn to propel a gondola. Then we can go alone. You must begin to learn to-morrow. You must get up at daylight. It will be easier; there won't be anybody or anything to bump into."

Horace considered.

"Well, you were very sweet about the chil-

THE NIGHTINGALE

dren and about going home. I might as well make one more 'bend of concession' and learn to work a gondola. Yes," he said resolutely, "I will do even that."

I cannot describe the result of this complete surrender on Horace's part. Married life is full of the ebb and flow of conquest and surrender. We all know the emotions each calls forth. This special conquest, however, seemed to make them both ridiculously happy.

Hilda gave her husband one of those rare, rare looks that are really the high-water mark of human understanding.

Horace took up the conversation.

"We will have three or four weeks to play Aucassin and Nicolette" — gondolas were pushed airily aside and left miles behind. "I wish I could change into a thistledown, though, so as to keep up with you, Hilda. You are like some starry substance. I never quite understand how you keep anchored to earth. I feel as though you might fly away any minute through the window, like Peter Pan. How did you ever come to marry a mere ordinary human being who lives on a planet?"

"It is sweet of you to think I am like a star," — Hilda's tones were a little muffled because of

THE NIGHTINGALE

the wooliness of the coat sleeve, — “but if I am, so are you. Everybody is. We are all made out of the same molecules. The special reason, though, that my molecules came to this earth was to find a philosopher. Even when I was a little bit of a baby I decided that, whatever else I did, I would marry a philosopher. It is the only way to be happy. They always understand; they never get surprised; they never get annoyed. But you have to come to earth to find them, because that is the only place there are women.”

“If the only way to be happy is to marry a philosopher, what happens to poor man? Must we all be unhappy?”

“Are you?” asked Hilda.

“No, I’m happy, but I have an exceptional wife. What do you suggest for the rank and file? They cannot all marry exceptions.”

“*Every* woman is an exception. Exceptions are the most important things in all rules. That,” said Hilda, tilting up her chin, “explains the importance of women!”

THE END

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